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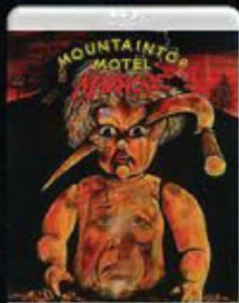
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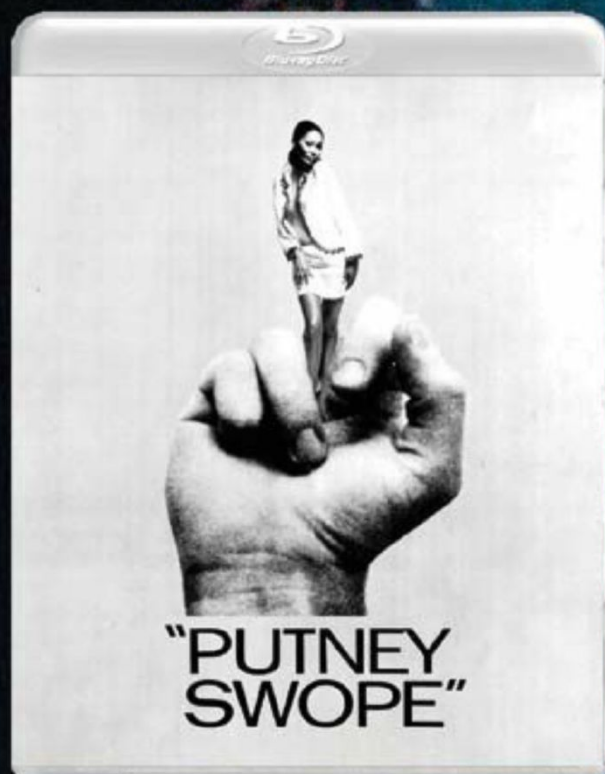
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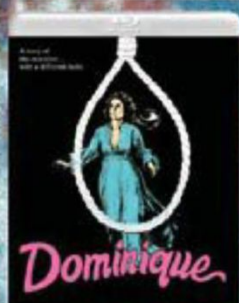
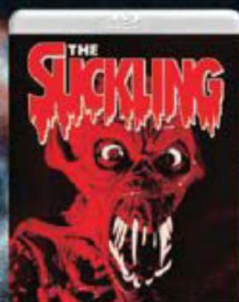


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Publisher/Editor

The Phantom of the Movies®

Official Phantom Biographer

Joe Kane

Circulation/Advertising

Nancy Naglin

Contributing Writers

David Annandale, Terry & Tiffany DuFoe, Ronald C. Epstein,
Tim Ferrante, Rob Freese, Joe Kane,
Nancy Naglin, Joseph Perry, John Seal, Bill Timoney,
Don Vaughan, Scott Voisin

Digital/Social Media Coordinator/Design Consultant/

Cover Design

Kevin Hein

Tech Coordinator

Tom Barnes

Spiritual Advisor

Guidance Ro-Man



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Dedicated to the Memory and Living Legacy of Larry Cohen

The Phantom of the Movies' **VideoScope** (ISSN 1083-2920), Vol. 27, No. 111, Summer 2019 (July–Sept. 2019). Published quarterly by PhanMedia, L.L.C. at 77 Franklin Ave., Ocean Grove, NJ 07756. Subscription rate: Six issues \$28 (US), \$40 (Canada), \$50 (International). Periodicals Postage Paid at Red Bank, NJ and additional mailing offices. Postmaster: Send address changes to PhanMedia, L.L.C., PO Box 216, Ocean Grove, NJ 07756. Copyright 2019 PhanMedia, L.L.C. *The Phantom of the Movies* and *VideoScope* are registered in the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office. All Rights Reserved. Reprint or reproduction of any material in part or in whole without the publishers' written permission is strictly forbidden. Editorial views expressed by contributing writers are not necessarily endorsed by PhanMedia, L.L.C. All rights to letters/e-mails sent to **VideoScope** will be treated as unconditionally assigned to **VideoScope** for publication unless otherwise noted. Not responsible for unsolicited manuscripts or material. PhanMedia, L.L.C. assumes no responsibility for the authority of advertisers to sell transferred property. *Advertising:* Nancy Naglin, PhanMedia, L.L.C., PO Box 216, Ocean Grove, NJ 07756. FAX: 732 988-9180 E-mail: phanmedia@aol.com. Printed in the U.S.

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—Joe Dante

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The Phantom Speaks!

DRIVE-IN AMBITION: Our resident drive-in maven Rob Freese leads us into our annual summer ozoner special with a visit to a legendary drive-in theater, Pennsylvania's Mahoning, that's not only surviving but thriving, for a chat with documentarian Alexander Monelli, whose new film **At the Drive-in** chronicles this inspirational tale of movie love and devotion. Our dynamic dad/daughter duo, Terry & Tiffany DuFoe, catch up with iconic actress and drive-in diva Belinda Balaski, a welcome presence in such classic genre fare as **Bobbie Jo and the Outlaw**, Bert I. (Mr. B.I.G.) Gordon's **Food of the Gods**, and a pair of Joe Dante-directed faves, **Piranha** and **The Howling**; Belinda more recently appeared in Dante's segment of the new chiller anthology **Nightmare Cinema**. Then it's back to Rob for reviews of a wide range of vintage drive-in titles, from William Greffe's shark shocker **Mako: Jaws of Death** to Greydon Clark's mutant cat romp **Uninvited**, making their much-anticipated Blu-ray debuts. Rob also checks in with actor/theater director Matt (The Mutilator) Mitler, who recalls his gritty experiences on the genre indie front lines, from confronting aggravated freaks in Frank Henenlotter's **Basket Case 2** to covering for an errant Cameron Mitchell in **Mutant War**.

Elsewhere in this ish, our roving cinema correspondent Joseph Perry reports on film fests in such far-flung locales as Boston and Brussels; Scott Voisin presents a sneak-peek excerpt from his upcoming Jon Polito biography **Unicycling on the Edge of the Abyss**, a harrowing on-set account of the Curse of **The Crow** and the tragic death of star Brandon Lee; and voice actor Bill Timoney recalls his close encounter of the stern kind with filmmaker hero Woody Allen. Plus our crack crew of columnists and crux weigh in with their opinions and ruminations re the latest DVD and Blu-ray releases.

OBIT ORBIT: The film world lost a true genre giant with the passing of one-of-a-kind movie maverick Larry Cohen, 82, responsible for such indelible fare as **It's Alive**, **God Told Me To**, **Q—The Winged Serpent**, **The Stuff** and scores more. In addition to staging your own Larry Cohen home film festival, we recommend you scope out Steve Mitchell's feature-length documentary **King Cohen** and Michael Doyle's voluminous interview book **Larry Cohen: The Stuff of Gods and Monsters** (BearManor Media), as well as our own career-spanning conversations with the irreverent auteur (**VS** #48 and #104).



We were also saddened to learn of the departure of character king Billy (The Untouchables) Drago, 73, a dynamic thesp whose charismatic villainy injected much-needed juice into a slew of otherwise low-level flicks, especially during the busy Direct-To-Video era, and French actress Edith Scob, 81, forever etched in horror fans' memories for her moving turn in Georges Franju's **Eyes without a Face** (1960). Other performers who've fallen to the Reaper's furiously swinging scythe since last we convened include comic legend Tim Conway, 85, Doris Day, 97, Filipino genre stalwart Eddie Garcia, 90, Susan Harrison, 80, fondly recalled as **Key Witness**'s Ruby the temptress, screen Chewbacca Peter Mayhew, 74, Sylvia (Midnight Cowboy) Miles, 94, Anne (Motorcycle Gang) Neyland, 84, Allene (The Red House) Roberts, 90, Peggy (The Vampire's Ghost) Stewart, 95, and dancerturned-action-movie mogul David (West Side Story) Winters, 80.

Behind the camera casualties include screenwriter Pat (The Vampire, The Monster That Challenged the World) Fielder, 90, and directors John Llewellyn (City of the Dead, The Night Strangler) Moxey, 94, John (Boyz n the Hood, Rosewood) Singleton, 51, and Franco (Romeo and Juliet) Zeffirelli, 96. Music legends Mac (Dr. John) Rebennack, 77, Leon Redbone, 69, New Orleans rock pioneer



Dave Bartholomew, 100, and blues great Lazy Lester (aka Leslie Johnson), 85, likewise left the building. Fortunately for the rest of us, their work can continue to be accessed and enjoyed far into the future.

PHLATSCREEN PHLASHES: Among the films we caught during the run-up to press time, we especially enjoyed revisiting a trio of early 1970s Brit horror hits, new on Blu-ray via Kino Lorber: Roger Moore in dual roles in Basil Dearden's tricky doppelganger mind-bender **The Man Who Haunted Himself** (1970); Marlon Brando in Michael Winner's **The Nightcomers** (1971), an imaginative prequel to Henry James' venerable **The Turn of the Screw**, a story earlier adapted in Jack Clayton's brilliant Deborah Kerr showcase **The Innocents**; and the bizarre sci-fi **Scream and Scream Again** (1970), featuring cameos by Peter Cushing and Christopher Lee, plus a somewhat meatier (yes, mostly ham) perf by Vincent Price.

Feeling Brod-minded, we also embarked on a Broderick Crawford streaming binge via a quartet of '50s titles—Robert Parrish's **The Mob** (1951), wherein undercover cop Crawford drinks beer with white wine chasers (!) the better to sell his faux identity as a New Orleans dock worker; Phil Karlson's brilliantly ironic **Scandal Sheet** (1952), based on a story by Sam Fuller, wherein ruthless tabloid publisher Brod rides roughshod over all and sundry, including a young John Derek and Donna Reed; Russell (Wicked Woman) Rouse's **New York Confidential** (1955), with the Gruff One cast as an iron-fisted crime boss locked in mortal conflict with rebellious underling Richard Conte; and, switching genres, Alfred L. Werker's downbeat western parable **The Last Posse** (1953), with BC as a put-upon sheriff battling both bad elements and the bottle.

Among the contempo cinema crop, we were impressed by the far-fetched but fact-based **The Mule**, wherein Clint Eastwood, as the titular nonagenarian drug runner, earned Oldest Pro to Direct and Star in His Own Movie honors. Clint did cheat a mite, though—he was only 87 at the time of filming. Still hoping to see him strap on the six-shooters and return to the big screen as the Old Man With No Name.

In the meantime, till next time, don't forget to...

Keep watching the screens!



Phantom Pheedback



JOY OF SIX

Dear Phantom,

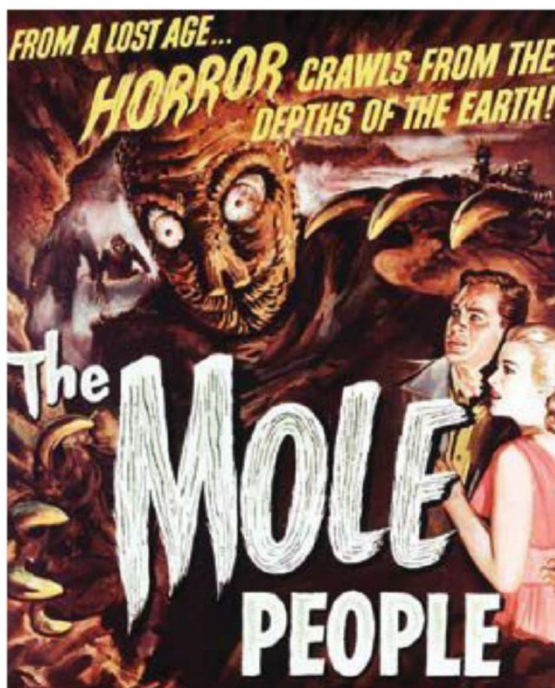
If forced to choose a favorite among the half-dozen "50s Fearfests" featured in the current VS #110 (pages 34-35) I'd opt for Jack Arnold's **Tarantula**. **The Mole People**, however, would place a close second with **The Land Unknown** not far behind in third. Both were directed by Virgil Vogel and scripted by Laszlo Gorog. Gorog also co-wrote AIP's **Earth vs the Spider**, one of the best from "Mr. Big" Bert I. Gordon.

The Mole People is an intriguing mixture of horror, science fiction and fantasy with a great cast including John Agar, fresh from **Tarantula**, and Hugh Beaumont, destined for sitcom immortality the following year. I always thought **Leave It to Beaver's** Ward Cleaver (Beaumont) was the coolest of the '50s TV dads. In the episode **Voodoo Magic** when June Cleaver forbids the impressionable young Wally and Beaver from seeing a horror movie (**Voodoo Curse**) Ward doesn't directly interfere but jokingly calls his Mrs. a "real mean mother." Mr. Cleaver proudly proclaims that as a youngster he saw hundreds of horror films, read **Dracula** four times and even subscribed to **Weird Tales** magazine! Now that's the kind of dad who wouldn't mind a family trip down to the drive-in to catch **Lost Continent** ('51 version), **The Human Duplicators** (in the post-Beaver years), or even **The Mole People**!

Cynthia Patrick is a delight as the calm, mysterious Adad (Agar says Adel and Beaumont says Adal), the beautiful but shunned handmaiden of the Sumerian albino kingdom and inevitable Agar love interest. It's equally fun seeing veteran character actors like Alan Napier as the pasty-faced high priest of the cellar dwellers, as well as Nestor Paiva and Rodd Redwing, aka Lucas and Louis. Redwing was previously memorable as Louis, the doomed expedition foreman who met his demise early on in **Creature from the Black Lagoon**. Paiva, of course, was the "I, Lucas" boat captain of the first two Gill-Man features, graduating to the more refined Professor Lafarge for **The Mole People**.

I believe **The Mole People's** success paved a subterranean path for 20th Century Fox's excellent adaptation of Jules Verne's **Journey to the Center of the Earth** in 1959. I also maintain that the '56 Universal film influenced Stan Lee and Jack Kirby in the creation of The Moleman (later called The Mole Man), the first villain to challenge **The Fantastic Four** in their 1961 debut issue, launching The Marvel Age of Comics in the process. Back then, comic books often

6 **VideoScope**



took their cues from the movies, whereas these days it's usually the other way around.

Sure, the concept of a hollow earth populated with an underground civilization dates back centuries (thanks for the lecture, Doc Baxter) and can be found in the fiction of Edgar Allan Poe, Jules Verne and Edgar Rice Burroughs, not to mention **Superman and the Mole Men**! But Universal's **The Mole People** is an above average (if not above ground) effort, a "thematically rich, impoverishly produced flick," to quote the Phantom. With its dark, serious tone, pseudoscientific premise and menacing albeit enslaved "bug-eyed monsters" I'd describe it as a pulp magazine story brought to life. Overall it's a pretty bizarre movie for 1956, largely thanks to screenwriter Gorog.

I find it interesting that both **The Mole People** and **The Land Unknown** have surprise endings to some degree, each involving one of the principal characters, one female and one male. The conclusion of **The Mole People**, in particular, is disliked and considered unnecessary by many fans. I won't go into specifics that might involve spoilers, but I enjoyed the unpredictable nature of both films.

By contrast, **Tarantula** featured a more conventional "we destroyed the monster" ending, with young pilot Clint Eastwood among those jetting in to obliterate the oversized arachnid in a matter of minutes. **Earth vs. the Spider** has a similar finale, using electrical power instead of napalm to dispatch the eight-legged beast. Although **Tarantula** has the bigger budget,

both films are among my favorites in the giant insect/giant spider subgenre. **The Deadly Mantis** is somewhat less impressive, garnering only a two-and-a-half Ro-Man rating instead of three, but still has its effective moments.

—Timothy Walters, Muskogee, OK

*Thanks for your critique, TW. We would also give **Tarantula** the highest grade of those half-dozen contenders, boldly following as it did in the wake of what was arguably the definitive insect fear film of the '50s, 1954's **Them!** and still establishing its own identity with its tragically stricken scientist (Leo G. Carroll) subplot. We return to that creature-infested decade this issue with a look at a fresh trio of Universal shockers unearthed by the archivists at **Scream Factory**. Meantime, 'scope out Michael Feinstein's "Mole People" song on YouTube.*

ONCE UPON A TIMES

Hello,

I know **VideoScope** had a brief retrospective of **Monster Times** a couple of years back—can you tell me which issue that was in? **The Monster Times** holds a very special place in my heart. When I was a kid, **The Monster Times** was a huge influence in sparking my interest in genre films and helping me learn more about them. **TMT** covered a lot of films and filmmakers **Famous Monsters** wouldn't touch! It also had a great mix of other horror/sci-fi-related coverage. A lot of the "spirit" of **The Monster Times** found its way into **VideoScope**, and I think that's one of the reasons **VideoScope** is the only genre magazine I still purchase. (I love them all, but my physical media is now overwhelming my ability to store it all and I just had to cut way back—but of all of them, **VideoScope** is the one that I decided to keep!) Thanks so much!

—Michael Martin, via e-mail

*Yours truly served as **TMT** editor for most of its run, from 1972 till its unfortunate demise in 1976, and we strive, as you note, to keep the **TMT** spirit alive in **VideoScope**. Our **TMT** memoir appears in VS #50 and, in slightly different form, in our book **Found Footage: How the Astro-Zombies Saved My Life and Other Tales of Movie Madness** (see page 17). It wasn't until we found Facebook's lively **The Monster Times** Appreciation Group, though, that we learned that **TMT's** NYC crew exerted such a bracingly corruptive influence on towheaded (to say nothing of two-headed) Monster Kids, now well into middle age, across the heartland.*

(continued page 26)



The Phantom of the Movies'

NEW RELEASE SHELF

New release titles are followed by year, Phantom rating, director, lead actors, running time (with titles released in separate editions, the running time refers to the Unrated version), DVD and/or Blu-ray label and release date (month and year).

RATINGS KEY

⚡⚡⚡⚡

Couldn't be better

⚡⚡⚡1/2

Excellent

⚡⚡⚡

Good

⚡⚡1/2

Not bad; worth watching

⚡⚡

Mediocre, worthwhile for a particular thesp, director or genre

⚡1/2

Poor but may have points of interest

⚡

Just plain bad

1/2⚡

Even worse than that

0⚡

The pits

N/A

Not available on video

N.I.D.

Not in distribution

Special thanks go to Guidance Ro-Man for his ratings symbol suggestion.



AWAIT FURTHER INSTRUCTIONS

(2018)⚡⚡⚡

D: Johnny Kevorkian. Sam Gittins, Neerja Naik, Grant Masters, David Bradley, Holly Weston, Kris Sadler. 91 mins. (MPI Home Video) 12/18

Family gatherings at Yuletide season sometimes serve up their own brand of unease and tension, but director Kevorkian's U.K. horror film **Await Further Instructions** ratchets things up to a whole different level. Nick (Gittins) reluctantly brings his optimistic Indian girlfriend Annji (Naik) to his family's home for Christmas, despite the fact that he has not spoken with his parents for three years. Father Tony (Masters) tries to run his household like he manages his office, while Granddad (Bradley) hurls insults at Tony and gleefully spouts racist remarks. Nick's sister Kate (Weston) joins her grandfather in spew-

ing bigoted barbs, while her henpecked husband Scott (Sadler) sits by ineffectually. Mother Beth (Abigail Crutenden) does what she can to keep the peace, which isn't much. The group suddenly finds itself trapped in the house, with the windows and doors sealed by what appears to be metal. Enigmatic instructions appear on the living room television, informing the panicked people what to do, from not eating possibly contaminated food to scrubbing themselves with bleach. The instructions grow ever more sinister, and the family members start turning on one another and forming sides, with Annji a target of suspicion. **Await Further Instructions** is filled with paranoia and mystery reminiscent of classic episodes of Rod Serling's **The Twilight Zone**. Gavin Williams' clever script places family relations and modern society's uneasy relationship with and dependence on media under a microscope and comments on divides created by belief systems and people's inhumanity and intolerance.

Kevorkian crafts a harrowing and brutal chiller enacted by an excellent ensemble cast. The wild third act, filled with terrific practical effects and science fiction/horror elements, is a jaw-dropper. Extras include bonus interviews, storyboards and more.

—Joseph Perry

BELOVED BEAST (2018)⚡⚡⚡

D: Jonathan Holbrook. Jonathan Holbrook, Sanae Loetsis, Iva Treadwell, Morgen Johnson, Andrew Tribolini, Tabitha Bastien. 173 mins. (Indican Pictures) 9/19

All kidding aside, a "slasher" film may be fit for a "hack" director. A feature that relies on third-rate acting and second-rate special effects can be sold to a DVD distributor. In the long run, such productions may not be sustainable—even those audiences may prefer quality material from clever directors. In **Beloved Beast** Holbrook adds real thought to phony gore. His



Milton (Holbrook) is society's ultimate reject—a mentally deficient, deformed, homicidal maniac who escaped from an insane asylum. Nina (Loetsis) is a child at risk. Her trashy aunt (Treadwell) is an unsuitable guardian because her circle of friends are local sleazeballs. When Milton appropriates Nina's giant bunny mask, he becomes The Rabbit King, her childhood hero. Holbrook elevates his feature with quirky creative touches galore. Patrol officer Paul (Johnson) lives up to vocational stereotype by showcasing his expertise in donut trivia. He is briefed by his chief, who is cleverly interpreted by Tribolini, the Indie Man's J.K. Simmons. The director's knowledge of cultural history is highlighted in a scene where Nina is menaced by a decadent trio of spoiled Goth teens who want her to be their first human sacrifice. **Beloved Beast** works because its director gooses its genre with intelligence and social ambiguity.

—Ronald Charles Epstein

HAPPY DEATH DAY 2U (2019)

8881/2

D: Christopher Landon. Jessica Rothe, Israel Broussard, Phi Vu, Suraj Sharma, Sara Yarkin, Rachel Matthews, Ruby Modine. 100 mins. (Universal Studios) 5/14

This slasher sequel begins with the first film's geek Ryan Phan (Vu) being terrorized by the "Baby Face" killer, only to learn that his science project has had a detrimental effect on the multiverse in which we live. When Ryan attempts to correct the mistake, he resets the day, resulting in Tree Gelbman (Rothe) finding herself stuck in another time loop on her birthday. When she and Carter (Broussard) discover that Ryan and his science pals Samar (Sharma) and Andrea (Yarkin) are the cause, they hatch a plan to get Tree out of the loop. Soon, as Tree continues the very familiar day, there are little anomalies along the way, and she suspects something is amiss. It all comes crashing down when Tree sees that Carter is suddenly dating her archenemy, sorority twit Danielle (Matthews), and her roommate Lori (Modine) isn't pushing poisoned birthday baked goods on her. With some sciency shorthand, Ryan explains the idea of the multiverse and the connected dimensions. Not only does Tree have to escape the time loop she's stuck in, she also has to get back to her own dimension. When she meets her father for her birthday breakfast she realizes she may be in a dimension worth staying in. All the while another "Baby Face" killer is stalking her, and she keeps one step ahead of the killer by the most entertaining montage of self-snuffing ever committed to digital video. (Weird, the days of saying "committed to celluloid" are now behind us.) I went into **Happy Death Day 2U** with no expectations other than hoping to be entertained, as I was by the first one. This slasher sequel succeeds in taking the franchise in a more sci-fi direction, and if some of the slashing falls by the wayside until the climax, I didn't find that to be a bad thing. The best thing about this very funny, very twisty thriller is Rothe, who absolutely owns the movie. The first film was a surprise hit, showing that the lowly slasher formula still had some life in it. Since then, 2018's **Halloween** hit the scene, picking up a half-billion dollar worldwide gross and getting horror fans interested in old-school slice and dice. When **2U** hit screens in 2/19, it was met with bad timing and its twisty sci-fi plot didn't seem to connect with fans of the first one. When slasher films stray too far from the anticipated formula (like the superior but Michael-less **Halloween 3: Season of the Witch**), it doesn't matter how good they are to those fans who just want more of the same. That's a shame because Landon has really crafted a wonderful thriller that still fulfills hack-and-slash expectations in the stab-happy final moments. Extras include gag reel, deleted scenes and a couple of short

behind-the-scenes featurettes. If you are a slasher fan, I find it hard to believe that you won't enjoy spending another birthday with Tree and the gang.

—Rob Freese

ICEMAN (2017)881/2

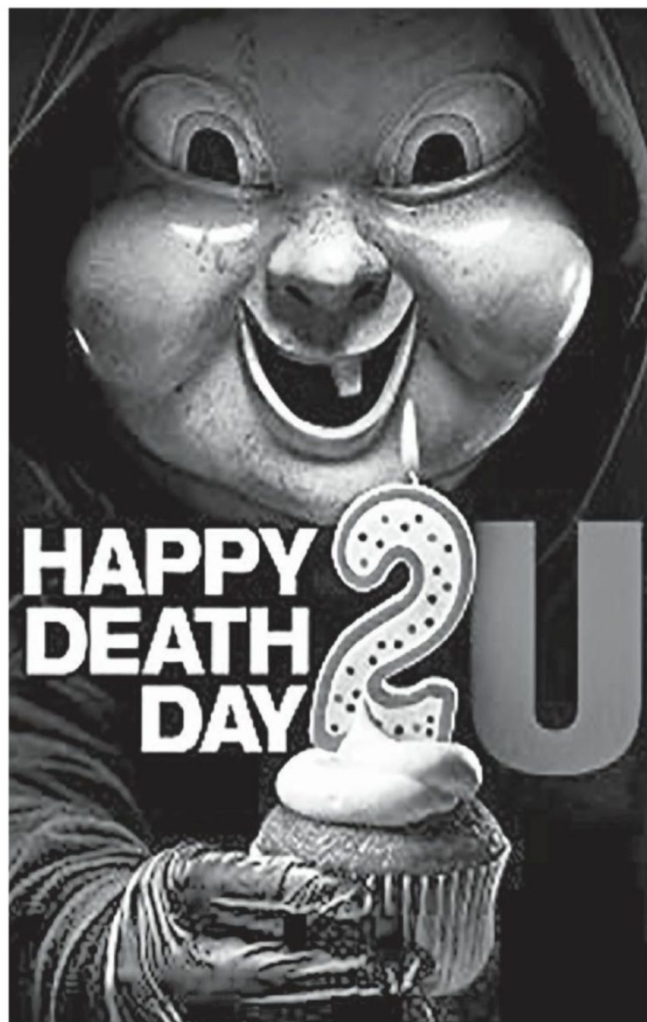
D: Felix Randau. Jurgen Vogel, Andre Hennicke, Suzanne Wuest, Savin Tambreau, Franco Nero. 96 mins. (Film Movement) 5/19

In 1991, hikers in the Austrian-Italian Otzal Alps discovered a frozen corpse, the mummified body of a 5300-year-old man murdered by an arrow hidden in his back. Most amazingly, his clothing, gear and weapons were intact. Iceman, dubbed Otzi, has been probed, poked and dissected at length, a process chronicled in fascinating detail in the documentary **The Iceman Murder Mystery** (VS #82). Now Felix Randau has brought to life a fictionalized version of what might have happened to cause Otzi to lose his life. Otzi's remarkably preserved possessions inspire the look and feel of the film. There's Vogel traipsing about in Otzi's boots and backpack while his begrimed family and clanspeople go about their daily tasks. There's magic and ritual in their lives as they honor their dead and treasure a magic box concealing a mirror/stone. They are, however, maddeningly stingy with language. Unfortunately, the dialogue is in Rhaetic, a fragmentary ancient alpine dialect, but there are no subtitles. Consequently, characters facing emotional anxiety come across in what is essentially an overly slow-paced silent film as needlessly simple. It's a muted, cheerless world; no jokes. Modern humans then and now are, well, human but even sex between these Neanderthal-acting people is zombified. Raiders come to Vogel's settlement while he's hunting, kill and rape and leave with the magic box. There's the hope an orphaned baby inspires, breathtaking alpine scenery and the pain of inconsolable loss. **Iceman** is a revenge quest, a western with shifting alliances, layovers with friendly folks—look for Nero playing an elder befuddled by Vogel's mission—and plenty of **Revenant** grit and suffering.

—Nancy Naglin

LEVEL 16 (2018)888

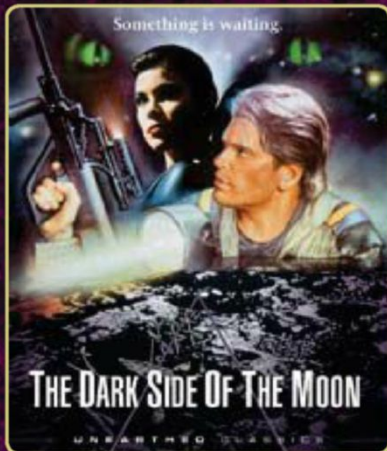
D: Danishka Esterhazy. Katie Douglas, Celina Martin, Sarah Canning, Peter Outerbridge, Amalia Williamson, Kate Vickery. 102 mins. (Dark Sky Films) 4/19



Though some elements of writer/director Esterhazy's futuristic fable **Level 16** are familiar—it has drawn numerous comparisons to Margaret Atwood's **The Handmaid's Tale**—the film boasts enough original angles to stand on its own. Esterhazy presents a tightly wound tale set in a foreboding, claustrophobic, clinically gloomy atmosphere. Vestalis Academy is ostensibly a rigidly run boarding school for orphaned girls. Vivien (Douglas), Sophia (Martin), and several other of the school's charges try to rise to the titular ranking, after which the promise of graduation and dream lives await. The girls are taught that the air outside the academy is poisonous, and whatever else severe Miss Brixil (Canning) deems necessary. Sophia betrayed Vivien several levels and years earlier, and the two are uneasily reunited in Level 16. Sophia tells Vivien to stop taking the academy's special mandatory "vitamins" if she wants to see for herself what really goes on in their shared dormitory room after lights out. The pair uncovers frightful truths in a place where brainwashing stands in for education. Douglas and Martin play off each other well, Canning gives a nice performance as the dictatorial headmistress, while Outerbridge contributes a creepy turn as the academy's physician, Dr. Miro.

—Joseph Perry

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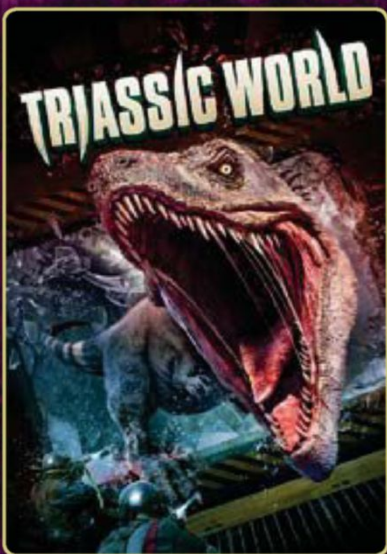
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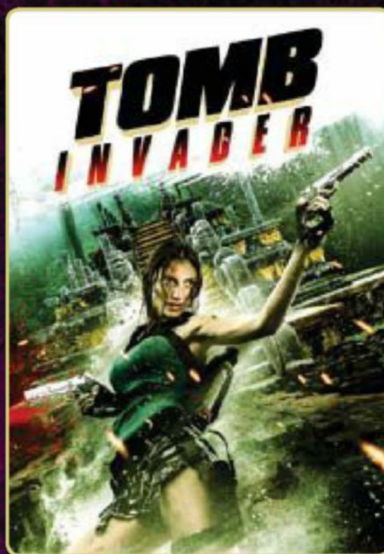
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THE UNSEEN (2016) 888

D: Geoff Redknap. Aden Young, Julia Sarah Stone, Camille Sullivan, Ben Cotton, Eugene Lipinski, Maxwell Haynes, Mary Chadburn. 108 mins. (Monarch Home Entertainment) 3/19

If you are a lower-class, picaresque Canadian male, you just may be a hoser. If that's you, you are probably a stereotypical character that can be found in such films as **Trailer Park Boys: The Movie**, **Fubar**, and this one. The first two are comedies, but this DVD is packaged as a "sci-fi thriller." Vancouver father Bobby Longmore (Young) ditches his promising pro hockey career, hot wife Darlene (Sullivan) and young daughter Eva (Stone) when he discovers that he is slowly becoming invisible. Bobby, now an errand boy for sleazy drug dealer Crisby (Cotton), is summoned by his ex to deal with their troubled teen—who has inherited Daddy's condition. Young is credible as The Invisible Hoser because his natural abilities are supported by cleverly applied makeup and creatively creepy puppetry. Stone is natural as Eva. This movie was created by British Columbians who believe that their province is more than just a stand-in for American locales. Fortunately, they don't offer strident Canadian nationalism, just gore flavored with maple syrup. This is expressed in a scene which gives new meaning to the old warning: Don't Feed the Bears. **The Unseen** makes Canadian genre talent visible.

—Ronald Charles Epstein

THE VAULT (-2018) 881/2

D: Dan Bush. Taryn Manning, Francesca Eastwood, Scott Haze, Q'orianka Kilcher, James Franco. 91 mins. (MVD Visual) 3/19

A team of bank robbers headed up by Manning and Eastwood take over Centurion Trust, holding staff and customers hostage. The upstairs vault turns out to be disappointingly empty, but assistant manager Franco tells the thieves that the real riches are in the old vault downstairs. Breaking open that vault, however, unleashes a deadly supernatural force. **The Vault** has a terrific premise—robbers run afoul of a haunted bank—and its first act is terrific. The robbery scenes are tense, disturbing, and the pace is relentless. As well, though we never see more than a few brief shots outside the bank, there's a palpable sense of a city where violence could explode at any moment. So the setup is top-notch. Unfortunately, once the ghosts are unleashed, the execution lets the premise down. The ghosts themselves aren't badly done, but the script begins to make less and less sense. One of the robbers set upon by the ghosts apparently disappears not only from a closed vault but from the memories of his cohorts, who never mention him again. The rules of the supernatural events are ill-defined, and we are left with many questions, not

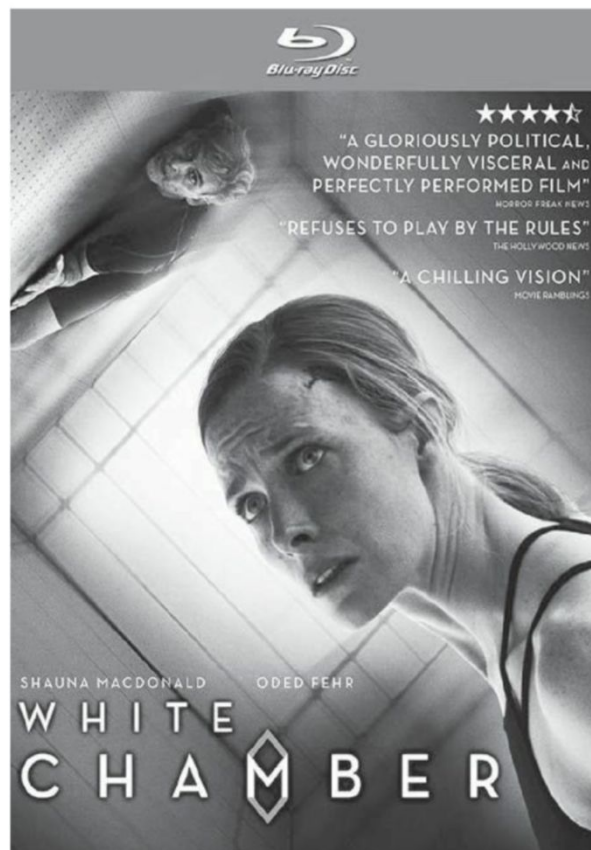
in the sense of mystery but of simple confusion. If the main action, then, is nowhere near as strong as the first act, the film remains entertaining. The cast does well, with Manning and Eastwood particularly strong as the leads, coming across as convincingly hard-boiled even when the script renders the actual characterizations a bit murky. While it's hard to give the film a resounding recommendation, there are enough elements that work to make it worth a look.

—David Annandale

WHITE CHAMBER

(2018) 88

D: Paul Raschid. Shauna MacDonald, Oded Fehr, Amrita Acharia, Sharon Maughan, Nicholas Farrell. 89 mins. (Dark Sky Films) 5/19



Civil war has erupted across the United Kingdom and Elle Chrystler awakens a captive in a sterile white cell. Her captor questions her relentlessly, using the many functions of the cell to torture her until she starts giving useful information. As the torturous interrogation continues, Chrystler fights to keep secrets but her captors know how to manipulate her and have a number of secrets of their own. This is a political sci-fi thriller that offers up a fair share of minor surprises and plot twists. The story unfolds in a non-linear fashion and we are given a glimpse of what is going on not only inside the cell but outside as well. This is a tight little thriller told with a limited cast and sets. What derailed it for me was the fact that it immediately calls to mind the superior **Cube** series, but it is never as clever as any of those flicks. MacDonald and Fehr do well propelling the drama, even though their characters feel underdeveloped. To me it all seems like a half-baked episode of **Black Mirror** that never fully takes a moral stand among all the character conflict. Those who enjoy the darker, grittier sci-fi flicks of the '70s will no doubt appreciate it. **White Chamber** moves at a brisk pace and poses a couple twisted ideas along the way, as good sci-fi should always strive to do. 8

—Rob Freese



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BEST OF THE FESTS: IMAGINE FILM FESTIVAL By Joseph Perry

Imagine Film Festival ran April 10–20 at EYE Filmmuseum in Amsterdam, the Netherlands, screening a superb selection of genre-film fare from around the globe. Among the plethora of cinematic offerings on tap were a Christmas-set terror tale, a Danish disaster film, a lo-fi documentary about the making of David Lynch's *Blue Velvet*, and two movies dealing with disparate types of domestic horror.

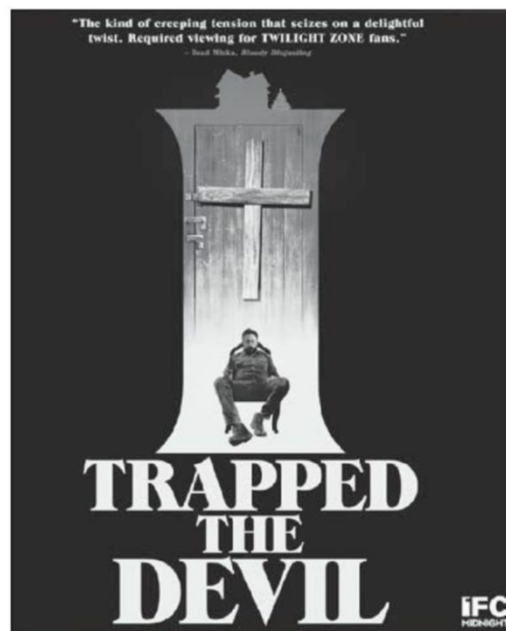
Josh Lobo's writing and directing debut, *I Trapped the Devil*, feels like an episode of the classic original run of *The Twilight Zone*—specifically, episode 41 from 1960, *The Howling Man*, written by the legendary Charles Beaumont. Both stories deal with imprisoning someone who claims to be the Devil himself. Matt (AJ [Satanic Panic] Bowen) and his wife Karen (Susan Burke) drop in without prior notice on Matt's psychologically troubled brother Steve (Scott Poythress) on Christmas. Steve is greatly displeased with this surprise intrusion, especially while dealing with the unseen person he has locked in his basement. He unleashes a volley of conspiracy theories and paranoid rants, and as Matt and Karen argue about whether to involve the police, they find their thoughts wavering about the possibility of truth behind Steve's ramblings. Poythress, Burke, and Bowen all turn in spirited performances, Lobo has an eye for creepy visuals, and Ben Lovett's eerie score helps build tension and dread. The dialogue some-

times slows down the pace, however, and Lobo hints early on as to who or what the person behind the door might be, which weakens the climax. The film feels a bit padded out even at 82 minutes. Overall, though, it is an entertaining effort well worth a watch.

The English-language Danish film *Cutterhead* sees Copenhagen Metro public relations employee Rie (Christine Sønderis) attempt to interview workers at the construction site of a subway building project. She follows Croatian miner Ivo (Kresimir Mikic) and Eritrean employee Bharan (Samson Semere) to watch them perform what should be a routine task, when a fire suddenly breaks out. The three find themselves struggling to stay alive as both temperatures and tempers rise and oxygen and water diminish. A white-knuckler on the surface and a thought-provoking look at class differences in Denmark for those who wish to dive deeper, *Cutterhead* puts its protagonists and viewers alike through the wringer. Director Rasmus Kloster Bro, who co-wrote the screenplay with Mikkel Bak Sørensen, does a masterful job of heightening suspense in tight, claustrophobic environments. Viewers can practically feel the heat and sweat in the film's suffocating spaces. Cinematographer Martin Munch keeps his camera right in the thick of things, adding to the sense of panic and despair. Fans of survival thrillers and disaster movies should fall in love with this nail-biter and its gritty mise-en-scène.

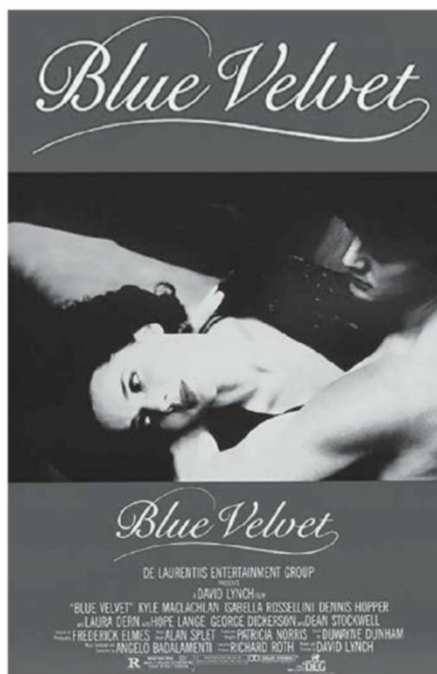
As a fan of David Lynch and *Blue Velvet* (1986)—one of my all-time favorite films—I was eager to see the documentary *Blue Velvet Revisited* (2016). Lynch invited German writer/director Peter Braatz to document the shooting of *Blue Velvet*, and 30 years later Braatz finally edited his Super 8mm footage and photographs together. Braatz eschews narration for an ethereal instrumental rock music soundtrack and excerpts from his on-set interviews with Lynch, stars Isabella Rossellini and Dennis Hopper, and other cast and crew members. The result comes across as a loose meditation and tribute to Lynch rather than a coherent documentary. *Blue Velvet Revisited* offers a nice amount of intriguing rare footage and audio, including Rossellini rehearsing her "Blue Velvet" nightclub scene without her wig and iconic dress, and Lynch discussing how he would like to make films using computers should the technology become available in the future. Fellow fans of the legendary director and his groundbreaking neo-noir/horror classic should find some nuggets to enjoy here.

The French shocker *All the Gods in the Sky* (*Tous les dieux du ciel*) examines the disturbing relationship between psychologically troubled Simon (Jean-Luc Couchard) and his invalid younger sister Estelle (Melanie Gaydos), the latter a victim of a horrifying accident when the two were children. After two decades of guilt dwelling on the tragic event, Simon refuses to let



anyone but himself take care of Estelle, although she requires much more than he can provide. Simon refuses to see his psychiatrist on a regular basis and take his prescribed medication because he believes that extraterrestrial forces will soon arrive to spirit him and Estelle away to a happier plane of existence. He even makes crop circles in an angry neighbor's field to signal the aliens. Adolescent Zoe (Zelie Rixhon) forms an odd relationship with the brother and sister, complicating matters for Simon. With pressures mounting and social services closing in, writer/director Quarxx cranks up the tension, crafting a mind-blowing third act. Couchard nails the character of Simon, portraying him as both repulsive and somewhat pitiable, while Gaydos is sensational in a nearly silent and still performance. Distressing, unnerving, and heartbreaking, *All the Gods in the Sky* will be a difficult watch for those uncomfortable with boundary-pushing cinema.

The Czech Republic chiller *Domestik* (aka *Domestique*) also documents the decay of a family, in this case a married couple whose separate and eventually competitive obsessions lead to the realm of body horror. Writer/director Adam Sedlák examines the fixations that drive wannabe professional cyclist Roman (Jiří Konvalinka) and his wife Charlotte (Teresa Hořová), who is as single-minded about getting pregnant as Roman is about being promoted from cycling team trainee to full-fledged member. While he increases both his vigorous training and experiments with dubious medical shortcuts, she forges ahead with a regimen of hormone therapy. The two clash over dietary and life-goal differences and grow increasingly hateful and caustic toward each other. Sedlák infuses his film with a claustrophobic feel and a sense of dread and unease. With no backstories about Roman and Charlotte, however, it is hard to care much for either, though both actors give uncomfortably believable performances. The third act is positively squirm-inducing. ♂



HEARD BUT NOT SEEN ADVENTURES IN VOICE-ACTING! WORKING ON A WOODY! By Bill Timoney

I began my acting career in 1978 while still attending college in my home state of New Jersey. I had one main ambition: to work on a Woody Allen film.

Back in the early 1970s, kids in my neighborhood rushed to the cinemas for every Woody Allen movie. But I wasn't one of 'em. I spent much of my boyhood haunting my favorite local cinemas—the Stanley Warner on Route 4 and the Century on Route 17, both in Paramus—and my Mom was my ride. However, my Mom did not share my appreciation of Mr. Allen's sense of humor. So I knew better than to ask her to drive me to **Bananas** or **Sleeper**.

I found ways to get my Woody fix despite Mom's disapproval. I watched the network TV premieres of **Play It Again, Sam** and **Don't Drink the Water**, film adaptations of Broadway plays Woody had written. And I still cherish the memory of the night I snuck downstairs after the family had gone to sleep so I could watch the 1 a.m. TV premiere of **What's Up, Tiger Lily?**, Allen's adolescent re-voicing of a Japanese spy flick. It made me giggle like a maniacal idiot.

My senior year in high school I directed a stage production of **Don't Drink the Water**. Freshman year of college I learned how to

kiss a girl thanks to **Annie Hall**. Sophomore year of college I directed a stage production of **Don't Drink the Water**. I transferred colleges and acted in a stage production of **Don't Drink the Water**.

After graduation, I applied for a job as assistant manager at the Century Theater in Paramus, my old haunt. The manager showed me the Century's next film—Allen's **Stardust Memories**. After the screening came the interview. The manager asked, "What did you think of the picture?" Many a young job applicant would have thought twice before answering honestly. But I wasn't one of 'em. "You're gonna lose your shirt," I replied. I did not get the job.

Allen made two films a year during the 1980s—a "Woody Allen Fall project" and a "Woody Allen Spring project." He seemed to employ every working actor in NYC—but I wasn't one of 'em. Woody even hired my Mom—she who wouldn't drive me to a Woody! Mom wasn't an actor; she had worked as a Vanna White-like TV game show model during the 1950s. Woody cast her in a small non-speaking role in one of his projects.

As the '80s became the '90s, I moved from acting on-camera to on-microphone. I found steady work as a voice actor, specializing in improvising dialogue for movies and TV shows, aka "looping." One day, our looping team received a cryptic booking—no title, no info. But when we reached the recording studio we discovered—we were working on a Woody! A producer led me into the recording studio. There sat Himself, studying his cue sheet with a pained expression. "Woody, this is Bill. He can do the job for you." Woody gave me the briefest of glances and said, "Read this line."

I found the real-life Woody to be the polar opposite of his on-screen persona. Accent on "polar." The Woody Allen I met that day was enormously powerful, supremely confident—and ice-cold. There would be no "I loved how you dubbed **What's Up, Tiger Lily?**, Woodman!" Not if I wanted to keep my job. But what exactly *was* my job?

The scene showed a Greek Chorus performing a classic tragedy. The dancers playing the chorus had delivered their lines in a very specific rhythm. Woody wanted to change that rhythm to make it funnier. So he hired us loopers to replace the dancers' dialogue. But since he didn't want the rest of the loopers to hear what he wanted changed, I became the guide track for the entire team.

Woody Allen and I stood together in a cramped booth for two hours. And there was absolutely nothing funny about it. His post-production people scrambled over themselves to apologize for



every little mishap, whether it was their fault or not. One time, Allen knocked his headphones off his head while gesturing on a line delivery, accidentally knocking the wire plug out of the jack. After Woody complained "I can't hear the beeps" and the staffers apologized, I reached out and plugged the jack back in. Woody said, "um." The staffers said, "Sorry, Woody."

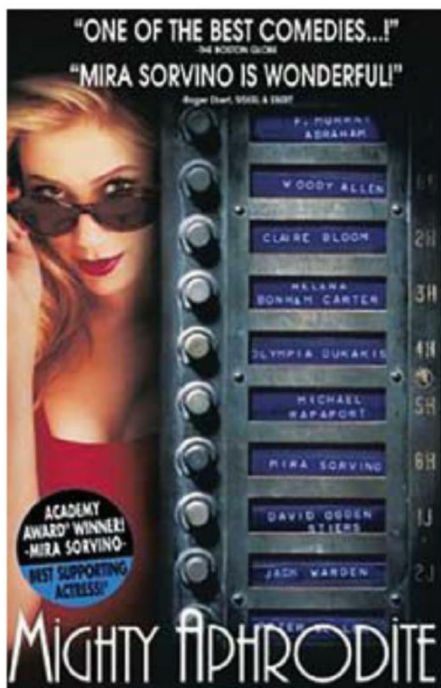
Weeks later, Woody's producers needed me to re-record a single line of the Greek Chorus: "Children grow up, they move out, sometimes to ridiculous places, like Cincinnati, or Boise, Idaho. Then they never call." Woody wanted a clutch-y pause between "Boise" and "Idaho." And he wanted my voice to do it. I was working in Nashville, but he had me flown to NYC and back just to record that one line.

Loopers are rarely acknowledged in a movie's credits. But Woody listed all of our names in the end credits of **Mighty Aphrodite**. I may not have done it on-camera, but I had finally worked on my Woody (and the credits prove it).

Mighty Aphrodite wasn't my last encounter with Woody Allen. In 2014, I was performing in the Broadway play **All the Way**. One Sunday matinee, a certain name spread like wildfire among the cast and crew backstage: "Woody! Woody!" Sure enough, there was Allen sitting on the aisle. We all knew that he was prepping his next project, and we all hoped that we might impress him enough to get a gig on his movie.

Sure enough, news broke a few weeks later that Woody Allen's next movie—**Irrational Man**, starring Joaquin Phoenix and Emma Stone—would feature three actors from the cast of the Broadway hit **All the Way**.

I wasn't one of 'em. 8



REELING BACK PECKING AWAY AT INJUSTICE

By Nancy Naglin

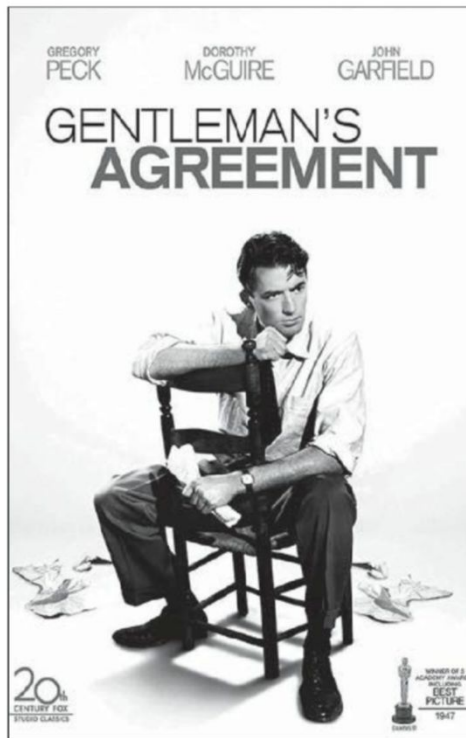
GENTLEMAN'S AGREEMENT (1947)
B&W 8888

D: Elia Kazan. Gregory Peck, Dorothy McGuire, Celeste Holm, Anne Revere, June Havoc, Albert Dekker, Dean Stockwell, Sam Jaffe. 118 mins. (20th Century Fox)

The social changes accompanying World War II roiled up all the latent and overt racism and ethnic hatreds that scar our history. The immediate postwar period turned to addressing ugly truths, an ongoing stop-go process, what with Jew-hating Nazi marchers at Charlottesville and a surge in synagogue and black church massacres, that not only persists but challenges each new generation to come up with an updated version of “the talk.”

Gentleman's Agreement sparked the talk, pushing an uncomfortable topic right in audiences' faces. No doubt the magnitude of the Holocaust helped trigger a drive to expose anti-Semitism. The delicate art of denying Jews access to “restricted” hotels, clubs, and professional opportunities, the “gentleman's agreement,” is dissected socially and morally in Moss Hart's stellar screenplay based on the best-selling novel by Laura Z. Hobson. Philip Schuler Green (Peck) is a widowed magazine writer, newly arrived in New York with his flinty but doting mother (Revere) and son Tom (Stockwell, an outstanding child actor not yet aware he would grow up to be remembered for lip-syncing about a “Candy Colored Clown They Call the Sandman” in **Blue Velvet**), to work for a powerful **Time**-like magazine. Green simultaneously falls for chief editor Minify's (Dekker) socially aware, idly rich niece Kathy Lacy (McGuire) and commits a la **Black Like Me** (1964) and **BlackKkKlansman** (2018) to writing a scathing expose of anti-Semitism by passing as the despised other, this time the Jew, who as his Jewish secretary (Havoc) acknowledges to Green means changing your name, conspiring to not let in the “bad” Jews, and not rocking the boat.

Each scene is an eye-opener for Green. In fact, the script is arranged so that every interaction—Green with his Jewish war buddy Dave (Garfield), Green with Kathy who is so proud of Green's commitment but argues she has to tell her sister and brother-in-law Green is not really Jewish, lest she shame her sister in front of their Connecticut friends—reinforces the revelatory education process. A superb scene featuring Albert Einstein



stand-in Professor Fred Lieberman (Jaffe) in a riddle-like monologue attacks the conundrum of what is a Jew. Caught in the middle is Green—Peck already in Atticus Finch mode—who broods and frets and is ready to throw over a marriage for principle.

This is an intimate script where people talk shockingly frankly (all the taboo words are enumerated) and plumb emotions; aside from its pre-feminist moorings, it's hardly dated at all. There's Green, angst-ridden about a pending break-up with Kathy, lolling on honorary male writer Anne Dettrey's (Holm) couch, aware that she's in love with him but opening his heart anyway. Coming and going is Garfield's very believable, pragmatic Dave, ready to lay bare the insults he's endured. Alongside the still timely theme, the film—its sets, drinking spots, male/female sparring, the banter and camaraderie—memorializes New York high society and a vanished magazine world. But even after all the decades, the rawness of the talk can make you squirm. Extras include commentary by June Havoc and Richard Schickel. Behind the camera there's an ironic note about scapegoating: Not long afterward Elia Kazan, in a move he could never live down, named names for the House Un-American Activities Committee; Ann Revere and Albert Dekker were later blacklisted.

The same year saw the release of Robert Ryan's breakthrough, typecasting performance in **Crossfire** as low-life Montgomery, the Ryan brand bad guy, a bigoted newly decommissioned soldier who beat victim Joseph Samuels (Sam Levene) to a bloody pulp and left him dead in his house because he was a Jew. This compelling, unvarnished gem combines noir, demimonde and nascent social conscience wound tight around



Ryan's violent and despicable character. Directed by Edward Dmytryk, **Crossfire** is awash in brooding resentments. Richard Brooks, a screenwriter and director (**Elmer Gantry**, **In Cold Blood**), wrote the underlying 1945 novel, **The Brick Fox Hole**, about a homosexual victim when he was in the Marines making training films. Ryan, a fellow Marine and also a life-long civil rights activist, met Brooks and insisted he had to have the role. Because the Hays Code would not permit depictions of gay characters, the Samuels character was invented to explore Jew-hating prejudices about intermarriage and dating as well as the hitherto unspoken “restrictions.” Robert Young and Robert Mitchum play investigators getting to the truth about the murder through dueling flashbacks. The technique is surprisingly successful as different suspected members of a group of decommissioned military pals tell their versions of events. **Gentleman's Agreement** won Best Picture in 1947, but **Crossfire** was the first B movie to receive a Best Picture nomination.

Two years later, **Home of the Brave** helped pave a way to start talking about Jim Crow. Private Peter Moss (James Edwards) is well accepted as the only black guy in his platoon on a Japanese-held island when, in the heat of battle, his best friend Finch (Lloyd Bridges) unleashes his racism. Psychologically scarred, Moss is unable to walk until his doctor (Jeff Corey) gets him to accept he's internalized conflicted feelings of rage, betrayal and inferiority. Interestingly, the solution lies within Moss rather than with calling out the system that brought on the paralysis. The film is based on a play by Arthur (**West Side Story**) Laurents, a Jew who admitted late in life he'd changed his name from Levine “to get a job.”

Nancy Naglin's ART-HOUSE VIDEO

**"Musical scores branded
on bare buttocks can
actually be sung."
*Bosch: The Garden
of Dreams***

BOSCH: THE GARDEN OF DREAMS (2016) 88 1/2

D: Jose Luis Lopez-Linares. Silvia Perez-Cruz, Ludovico Pamuk, Guo-Quian Cai, Sophie Schwartz, Philippe De Montebello, Salman Rushdie. 90 mins. (Film Movement) 5/19

What to make of two figures making love inside a mussel shell, butterflies bigger than men, disorienting Daliesque fruit plopped amidst fantastical animals, all just a mind-bending distraction from tiny nude people copulating ecstatically and pornographically or just as pornographically being tormented in Hell? Hieronymus Bosch (1450-1516) painted his triptych *The Garden of Earthly Delights*—the left panel depicting God giving Eve to Adam in the Garden of Eden, the nightscape right panel, *The Last Judgment*, showing magnificent explosions, and the middle panel devoted to a Woodstock-like nudist colony—between 1495 and 1505 and ever since successive generations have stood agape formulating new interpretations. Straightforward religious narrative, heresy, or obscure objections to contemporaneous political events, take your pick. Now former Metropolitan Museum of Art director Philippe De Montebello and 38 other experts, mostly European, entertain, taking a crack at the religious porno riddle. The point of seeing this film is the opportunity to observe Bosch's twisted genius up close in exquisite detail and, like the filmed museum-goers, be titillated and provoked. The commentary is episodic, by turns respectful, trivial, and occasionally revelatory: For example, musical scores branded on bare buttocks can actually be sung. We learn how Bosch assigned evil to a rabbit's eye and that Dali appropriated images, but the film progresses as a hodge-podge, short on unifying analysis. Best is when no one speaks and the camera scans the details of the painting. The ubiquitous Salman Rushdie weighs in with the last word: "It's memorable; no idea what it's about."

SHOOTING STARS (1928) B&W 88 1/2

D: Anthony Asquith, A.V. Bramble. Annette Benson, Brian Aherne, Donald Calthrop, Chilli Bouchier, Tubby Phillips. 110 mins. (Kino Lorber) 4/19

Restored from surviving elements by the British Film Institute, *Shooting Stars* features Brian Aherne (later of Hollywood fame, from *A Night to Remember* with

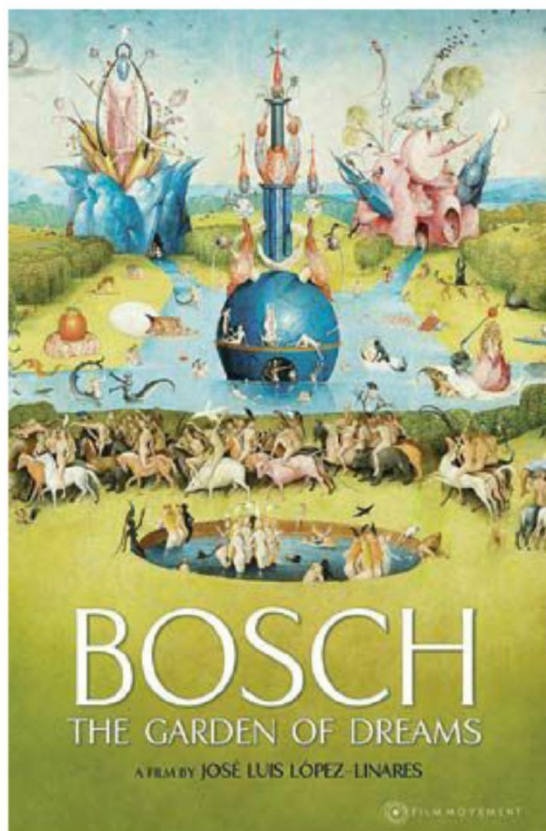
Loretta Young to late-career TV appearances in *The Twilight Zone* episode *The Trouble with Temptation* as well as *Wagon Train* and *Rawhide* episodes) as film heartthrob Julian Gordon in both an on- and off-screen marriage to conniving, adulterous wife Mae Feather (Benson). (Aherne was also close friends with George Sanders and wrote Sanders' bio *A Dreadful Man* published after Sanders' death in 1979.) A very clever plot shows them shooting scenes for their new film *Prairie Love*, while off-screen Feather pursues the smooth onscreen slapstick comic Andy Wilkes (Calthrop). The title takes on a dual meaning when Feather decides to finally be rid of nice guy Gordon by loading a prop gun with real bullets. A handful of silent films speak with a modern tone and this is one of them. The acting, narrative and opinions mine the complexities of attraction and infidelity in a completely undated and compelling way. You practically forget there's no talking. Intrigue there's plenty of plus comeuppances and reversals of fortune. Silent films frequently compensate by doubling down on the emotional ice pick to the heart—*The Man Who Laughs* (VS #48) and *Sunrise* (VS #19) come to mind. *Shooting Stars*, with an ending that will haunt you, is in their league. Of particular interest are the overhead and crane shots intended to enhance the movie-in-the-making atmosphere. The only false note is the new score by John Altman, which is either tonally out of sync or overwhelming and sounds like "Singing in the Rain" and "Ukulele Lady."

THE STRANGER (1967) 88 8/8

D: Luchino Visconti. Marcello Mastroianni, Anna Karina, Mimmo Palmara, Georges Geret. 104 mins.

The 1942 novel *The Stranger* by Albert Camus is a book of haunting, stripped-down prose, endless mystery, and commanding presence. Seen on YouTube, Visconti's 1967 film, with a screenplay assist by Camus, captures the mood and substance of the literary work; the sets and cinematography zone in on the details—the heat, the pitiless Algerian sun, the main character Meursault's detached interactions—bringing to life the novel's existential themes and making Luchino's film a masterpiece. Meursault (Mastroianni) is a Frenchman living in colonial Algiers, well satisfied with his uncomplicated life as a billing agent, seemingly without purpose or ambition. The rawness of death in poverty intrudes when his aged mother dies and he makes the trek to a

rural old age home for the unvarnished burial. Meursault declines seeing his mother's body, smokes and drinks coffee in front of the coffin, and the very next day starts an indifferent sexual liaison with Marie (Karina), who will want to marry the not-at-all eager Meursault. Meursault treats life phenomenologically like a writer might—as a passive, if curious, onlooker—which leads him to innocently getting embroiled in a neighbor's tawdry love life, resulting eventually, in the random way life trips up everybody, to his undoing. Neighbor Raymond (Geret) is a loathsome pimp who wants revenge on his Arab ex-girlfriend and persuades Meursault to write the girl a letter asking her to visit, so he can beat her up. After the police brouhaha dies down, Raymond invites Meursault to a beach house where Raymond, confronted by the girl's brother and his pals, is wounded in a knife fight. Meursault takes away Raymond's gun but walking alone later meets up with the Arabs. The sun glints off the knife and, feeling threatened but, more importantly, in keeping with his character, made crazy by the heat, Meursault pumps four bullets into the Arab. "Why four?" the judge will want to know. Because if you have a gun in your hands, that's what you do. Visconti does a superb job presenting the existential torture rack. Meursault is condemned because he didn't show emotion at his mother's funeral, scorns God, and because, according to Camus, "he does not play the game." The book and the film live because anyone who has ever been caught up in a bureaucratic nightmare will recognize the Catch 22. Mastroianni inhabits the role; Alain Delon was originally tapped to play Meursault. 8



The Phantom's NOIR GANG

BOB LE FLAMBEUR (1956) B&W

888

D: Jean-Paul Melville. Isabelle Corey, Roger Duchesne, Daniel Cauchy, Guy Decomble, Howard Vernon. 102 mins. (Kino Lorber) 7/19

While conjuring memories of *The Asphalt Jungle* (VS #102), *5 Against the House* and other Stateside period capers, Melville's **Bob Le Flambeur** (Bob the Gambler or, more accurately, **High Roller**) emerges as something of an *anti*-heist film. Aided enormously by cinematographer Henry (Purple Noon) Decae, Melville paints a pleasingly seedy Parisian nocturne inhabited by gamblers like the world-weary but essentially good-hearted Bob (Duchesne), pimps, scam artists and loose ladies (the last-mentioned contingent fetchingly embodied by Corey). Irony, wit and sexual candor outweigh the violence and hardboiled 'tude elements of Bob's Yank counterparts, and Melville devotes far more screen time to developing his characters than detailing the caper machinations (sort of a *Riffi* in reverse). Still, while the final reel may disappoint hardcore heist fans, the scene's supreme irony more than carries the day. **Bob** went a long way in creating the blueprint for the French New Wave, a crest surfed by such better-known noir-embracing Gallic auteurs as Jean-Luc (*Breathless*) Godard and Francois (*Shoot the Piano Player*) Truffaut. Extras include an audio commentary, documentary, trailer and more.

CRASHOUT (1955) B&W 888 1/2

D: Lewis R. Foster. William Bendix, Arthur Kennedy, Luther Adler, Marshall Thompson, William Talman, Gene Evans, Beverly Michaels, Gloria Talbott. 89 mins. (Olive Films)

Returning to his pre-*The Life of Riley* screen thug roots (e.g., *The Dark Corner*, *The Blue Dahlia*) as shrewdly brutal sociopath Van Morgan Duff, Bendix steals 180 grand and the show, while an ever-versatile Adler gives him a thespian run for his money as Mexican crony Pete Mendoza. The two are among six fugitive survivors of a bloody prison breakout currently holed up in a nearby secret cave, a key component of Van's master escape plan. While roving guards vengefully gun down stray inmates, *Night of the Living Dead*-style, our cons play a fractious waiting game, grumbling and baiting one another until it's time to move on into a hostile civilian world. A brilliant hard-boiled script, penned by director Foster and former East Side Kid turned producer Hal E. Chester, powers this stark character study. In

addition to Bendix and Adler, Kennedy, as brainy embezzler Joe Quinn, Talman, as religious psycho Luther Remsen, Evans, as born follower Monk Collins, and Thompson, as hard-luck kid Billy Lang, all make the most of their moments. Fave '50s noir queen Michaels sheds her usual angle-playing dame persona, perfected in films like Russell Rouse's inspired *Wicked Woman* (VS #109) and the Hugo Haas potboiler *Pickup*, as Alice Mosher, an unmarried mother who forms a burgeoning romantic bond with sensitive convict Quinn. An equally welcome future *I Married a Monster* star Talbott shines in a textured role as a failed singer returning to her home town in defeat who establishes a rapport with Lang in the course of a tense train ride. Ever-dependable character creep Percy Helton gets to portray a rare normal character here, a hapless doctor kidnapped by the cons. Add a cruelly ironic ending and you have one of the era's best breakout movies, ranking with Howard W. Koch's Broderick Crawford showcase *Big House, U.S.A.* (VS #96) released the same year.

711 OCEAN DRIVE (1950) B&W

888

D: Joseph M. Newman. Edmond O'Brien, Joanne Dru, Otto Kruger, Don Porter, Barry Kelley, Dorothy Patrick, Sammy White. 102 mins. (Mill Creek Entertainment) 3/19

In a tale that follows the time-honored *Scarface* rise-and-fall template, noir stalwart O'Brien stars as Mal Granger, a compulsive gambler and ambitious electronics wiz who, at the behest of his cheery tipster pal Chippie (White, who easily pockets his scenes), ditches his 9-to-5 phone-company drudgery to take a gig streamlining big-shot bookie Vince Walters' (Kelley) growing business. When an angry debtor pops Walters, Mal wrests control of the operation, attracting syndicate attention in the form of civilized crime kingpin Carl Stephans (Kruger) and second in command Larry Mason (Porter), whose dishy wife Gail (Dru) takes up with a danger-baiting Granger. *711 Ocean Drive* benefits from a bigger canvas and longer runtime than most contemporaneous noirs enjoyed, and director Newman makes the most of both, though his Boulder Dam-set climax comes off as a bit too protracted. No one played gruff better than O'Brien, whether cast as hero or villain, and he deploys that skill expertly here, backed by a top character cast, from a smoothly evil Kruger to an oft-seething Porter, brutish Kelley, slinky Dru, breezy White and frequent screen criminal Robert Osterloh as a tight-lipped hitman. According to the new docu-

mentary *Sinatra in Palm Springs* (Shout! Factory), much of the action was lensed in and around Ol' Blue Eyes' beloved desert retreat. In addition to *711*, Mill Creek's 9-title *Film Noir Archive Volume I* collection (3-disc \$29.99 Blu-ray) includes *The Killer That Stalked New York*, starring Evelyn Keyes as an unwitting plague-carrier loose in the Big Apple in an atmospheric thriller actually lensed some months prior to Elia Kazan's similarly themed, better-known *Panic in the Streets* and featuring future *Spider Baby* player Beverly Washburn as a juvenile victim; George Raft in *Johnny Allegro*, an odd mash-up of noir tropes and *The Most Dangerous Game*, with an ever-villainous George (Gilda) Macready as a mad hunter; *Miami Story*, wherein Barry Sullivan seeks to nail crime boss Luther Adler (in another terrific turn); Dana Andrews and a typically suave George Sanders in *Assignment Paris*, more espionage than noir but well worth catching. Also on board are *Address Unknown*, Budd Boetticher's *Escape in the Fog*, the French Revolution-set suspense *The Black Book* (aka *Reign of Terror*), and the postwar psychological drama *The Guilt of Janet Ames*. 8



BEST OF THE FESTS: ARROW VIDEO FILMFEST GLASGOW

By Joseph Perry

This year's edition of Arrow Video Fright-Fest Glasgow—held February 28 through March 2 at the Glasgow Film Theatre—featured horror, science fiction, comedy, and dystopian drama, along with several movies highlighting mysterious female characters.

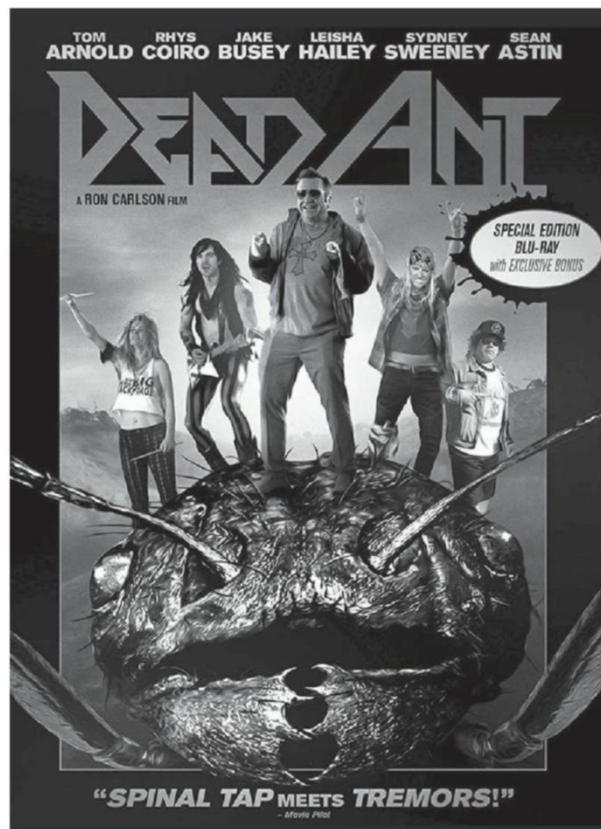
The black-and-white independent U.K. feature **Here Comes Hell** starts off as a British comedy of manners mashed up with old dark house elements reminiscent of such classics as **The Cat and the Canary** and **The 9th Guest** before kicking into full-on horror mode with echoes of Lucio Fulci and early Sam Raimi. First-time director Jack McHenry and his cast and crew have crafted a fun, frenzied slice of supernatural bedlam. George Walker, Jr., (Tom Bailey), son of an American oil tycoon, travels across the pond to visit some old chums from his Oxford University days. Victor (Charlie Robb) has just inherited his father's fortune and purchased dilapidated Westwood Manor. He has invited his sister Christine (Margaret Clunie), tennis star Freddie (Timothy Renouf), Freddie's new fiancée Elizabeth (Jessica Webber), and Walker for a housewarming seance. Medium Madame Bellrose (Maureen Bennett) contacts the home's deceased previous owner, Ichabod Quinn, a practitioner of the dark arts. Staging a seance in a scare film is rarely a good idea, and **Here Comes Hell** goes delightfully wacky as the party guests are subjected to insane visions and gory mayhem. McHenry and co-writer Alice Sidgwick's screenplay balances horror and humor marvelously. Plenty of blood-spilling and carnage are on display, sometimes played for laughs and other times not. The film's low-budget stop-motion and practical effects hold a great deal of charm, though its CGI effects show budgetary limits a bit more. The crack-jack ensemble cast is a hoot, and the film plays things straight enough that it avoids straying into the realm of camp.

Writer/director Ron Carlson's creature feature **Dead Ant** (retitled **Giant Killer Ants** for its U.K. release) sets out to be little more than a diversion best enjoyed with popcorn and, for some, adult beverages, and it succeeds in achieving exactly that entertainment level. Manager Danny (Tom Arnold) accompanies 1980s one-hit wonder metal band Sonic Grave on what is supposed to be a mind-expanding peyote trip in the desert before a comeback attempt at a local music

festival. One of the band members carelessly breaks local Native American Bigfoot's (Michael Horse) rule about respecting nature, which sets an army of six-legged freaks into vengeful CGI motion. Jake Busey, Rhys Coiro, Leisha Hailey, and Sean Astin star as the band members, putting in game performances along with the supporting cast members, but the characters are all pretty much stock ones, the jokes are evenly split between hitting and missing and depend on your tolerance for drug humor. Those who enjoy Syfy-level pics or '80s metal parodies seem to be the target audiences for **Dead Ant**.

An hypnotic, dark folkloric/fairy tale with horror overtones, **The Rusalka** (retitled **The Siren** for its U.K. release) is writer/director Perry Blackshear's follow-up to his eerie debut **They Look Like People** (2015). Blackshear, who also lensed the film, paces his slow-burn chiller masterfully, balancing dread with an awkward romance destined for a doomed outcome. Mute Tom (Evan Dumouchel) comes from a sheltered religious background. Although he stopped swimming after a childhood water accident that cost him his voice, he takes time away from his church to vacation at a lake house. He meets Al (MacLeod Andrews), whose spouse drowned in the lake, one of many recent deaths in that body of water. Al is trying to solve what he feels is a mystery surrounding his spouse's tragic demise. A woman named Nina (Margaret Ying Drake) swims to the cabin and strikes up conversations with Tom, who becomes captivated by her. As Tom's feelings toward Nina grow stronger, the church's hold on him slips away, and Al begins to suspect that Nina may know something about his husband's death. Dumouchel, Drake, and Andrews also starred in **They Look Like People** and once again give moving, gripping, realistic performances. Drake is superb portraying Nina's conflict between her dark impulses and passionate desires. Dumouchel is terrific in a wordless performance, and Andrews is splendid in a heart-breakingly intense role. This slow-burner makes its creature both dangerous and sympathetic, in the tradition of the classic Universal monster movies of yore.

Freaks plays in the science fiction/fantasy realm of such mutant superheroes and supervillains as The X-Men, but with more of an emphasis on a strong coming-of-age story. Lexy Kolker gives an exceptional performance as Chloe, a young girl who has been raised by her paranoid father (Emile Hirsch), who tells her that she can never go outside because evil people want to harm them. Temptation comes calling through ice cream truck driver Mr. Snowcone (Bruce Dern);



when he and Chloe meet, danger is indeed about. Chloe possesses powers that certain dark agencies want to control or wipe out. **Freaks**, from co-writers and co-directors Zach Lipovsky and Adam B. Stein, offers a scaled-down approach to superhero origin stories, emphasizing character development and drama over big-budget special effects. The result is a gripping, thrilling effort.

Another film dealing with a young girl with mutant powers is South Korea's **The Witch Part 1—The Subversion**, written and directed by I Saw the Devil scribe HoonJung Park. While **Freaks** shows some restraint, this movie goes the opposite route, serving up a violent, gruesome action spectacle. High school student JaYoon (DaMi Kim in an attention-grabbing debut) has had her memories of being held captive and experimented on by a shadowy agency blocked. Her friend MyungHee (MinSi Go) persuades JaYoon to go on a nationally televised talent show, where she performs a magic trick that tips off rival baddies to her true identity. This leads to a big third-act special-effects showdown, during which fists, bodies, and inanimate objects go flying and blood fills the screen. There is plenty to enjoy here, but the film fails to provide viewers with a protagonist for whom to root. Once JaYoon unleashes her superpowers, she comes across as no more moral or heroic than those who aim to bring her down. As the title heavily hints, the ending is left wide open for a sequel.

Other films on offer included director Billy Senese's supernatural chiller **The Dead Center** and the Swedish/Mexican diabolical doppelganger suspense **The Black Circle**. **X**

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BATTLE FOR THE LOST PLANET

(1986) 88 1/2

D: Brett Piper. Matt Mitler, Denise Coward, Joe Gentissi, Bill MacGlaughlin, Helene Michele Martin. 100 mins.

Harry Trent (Mitler) escapes Earth on the cusp of a global alien attack that leaves the planet a wasteland ruled by the pig-faced space invaders. Trent is unable to turn his malfunctioning ship around and is lost in space for five years until the vehicle finally passes Earth again, where Trent finds a wasteland populated by aliens, giant mutated monsters and beautiful warrior Dana (Coward). He falls in with wasteland ruffian Mad Dog Kelly (Gentissi), a former lab tech turned Stallone bro' heading up a harem and an army of redneck rubes. Trent convinces Mad Dog that if he can get them into the nearby lab where he formerly worked, he could use his code to the alien doomsday machine that could possibly wipe out the invaders for good. **Battle for the Lost Planet** (aka **Galaxy Destroyer**) is a charming low-budget romp of latex alienoids and stop-motion magic. Mitler is a hoot as the comedic corporate spy who bumbles into an adventure in which he holds the fate of the planet in his hands. Coward is gorgeous and plays well off Mitler's hero antics. (A former Miss Australia, she eventually broke into acting with roles in 1985's **Sudden Death** and as the nurse in the new scenes Sam Sherman filmed for a German pick-up eventually released as **The Bloody Dead**.) Gentissi as the horribly un-PC roughneck is absolutely hilarious but, no doubt, several of his comments will enrage some viewers today. (Sadly, this is actually the kind of jerk who would probably survive an alien attack.) Piper keeps the action moving as quickly as possible and fills it with some really cool stop-motion, forced perspective and matte effects. He uses every trick in the book to tell his alien apocalypse tale, building to an appropriately goo-spewing climax.

MUTANT WAR (1988) 88 1/2

D: Brett Piper. Matt Mitler, Cameron Mitchell, Deborah Quayle, Kristine Waterman, Robyn Lovett. 81 mins.

In **Mutant War**, we find Harry Trent (Mitler) roaming a destroyed city landscape and lucking upon a cache of whiskey and dirty magazines. Before our hero can enjoy his good fortune, a giant creature attacks. Off and running, Trent soon discovers Spider (Waterman), a young girl looking for her



sisters who were abducted by madman Reinhart Rex (Mitchell). Rex is abducting wasteland women to mate with his army of mutants so he can rule the world. Trent falls in with warrior Beth (Quayle) and they are soon taken captive by a group of punk rock idiots whose leader sports the most sinister-looking unibrow in the history of cinema. Talking his way out of immediate termination, Trent has a bad trip populated by flashbacks to the first film, then he's infiltrating Reinhart's mutant compound after Spider is taken hostage. There's a battle with a giant before the compound is raided by the punk rock idiots after they steal the cargo of an interplanetary arms dealer (Lovett). This is another wild and woolly sci-fi romp from Piper and Company filled with the director's signature special effects. Mitler again jumps into the hero role with tongue in cheek, making the most of what he has to work with and always cracking wise. He plays off Waterman well, adding an extra layer of depth to the character once he takes on the responsibility of protecting her until they save her sisters. Mitchell is fun to watch as he hams it up as the goofy dictator with the worst plan for world domination ever. Just as charming as the first film but a bit slicker-looking as it was filmed in 35mm, Piper's **Mutant War** delivers top-drawer low-budget thrills. Vinegar Syndrome's HD double feature offers a Piper introduction to each feature and an onscreen chat with same. 8

—Rob Freese

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FREESE FRAME

BITE ME! (2004) 88 1/2

D: Brett Piper. Misty Mundae, Julian Wells, Rob Monkiewicz, Michael R. Thomas, John Fedele, Erika Smith. 85 mins. DVD (Shock-O-Rama)

Strip club manager Ralph Vivino (Thomas) has less than two weeks to scratch together 50 grand to purchase the Go-Go-Saurus "gentlemen's club" from his deceased partner's widow Teresa (Wells). After Ralph buys a crate of tainted weed to sell for quick cash, the Go-Go-Saurus is soon overrun by disgusting little blood-drinking spideroids that hatch from mutant spider eggs inside the crate. Piper's vintage horror flick is a near-perfect drive-in monsterfest that delivers disgust bug attacks, loads of humor and tons of gratuitous nudity vital to plot development. Mundae gives her greatest perf as Crystal, the bimbo stripper turned bimbo bug-squasher. Wells and Thomas are terrific as the constantly quarreling entrepreneurs, while Monkiewicz, usually the tough-guy hero, is hilarious as dimwitted exterminator Terence "Buzz" O'Reilly. The flick is enriched with lots of Piper's trademark stop-motion creature effects. 'Scope it out. 8

—Rob Freese



MATT MITLER: MUTILATORS, MUTANTS & BASKET CASE 2

As Told To
Rob Freese

For fans of '80s horror, particularly slasher films from the early part of the decade, Matt Mitler is instantly recognizable from his first film role, Ed, Jr., in Buddy Cooper's 1984 **The Mutilator**. Over the course of the decade, between comedy gigs and theatre work, Mitler appeared in such films as **Battle for the Lost Planet**, **Mutant War**, **Deadtime Stories**, **Breeders**, **Maximum Thrust** (aka **The Occultist**), and **Basket Case 2**, among others. In 1997 he founded the Dzieci Theatre, which is committed to Art as a path for transformation. (Scope it out at <http://dziecitheatre.org/>.) Mitler took time from his busy schedule to talk to us about his early sci-fi epics with Brett Piper, his **Mutilator** memories, and more.—RF

ROB FREESE How did you become involved with **Battle for the Lost Planet**?

MATT MITLER I didn't audition for it. I didn't meet Brett. He contacted me and asked me if I'd be interested in looking at the script. I think he had seen, maybe, **Deadtime Stories**. He sent me the script and I loved it.

RF What was your impression of Brett Piper?

MM He was a fascinating guy to me. I really liked him a lot. I got a kick out of reading his screenplay. A lot of screenwriters write for the film that's being shot; it's not written to be read as literature. But he wrote a script that was fun to read. Frank Henenlotter did the same thing. He wrote a script that was really fun to read, making certain comments to the readers themselves, like, "You might think the person will open the door and there would be a creature there, and you'd be right." Stuff like that. Brett was an enigma, too. Here is this guy, with all these little things he's building in his little shop. He's doing it all singlehandedly. I have a background in fine arts, so I really appreciated his craftsmanship, which was just extraordinary. I mean, not just the creatures. He built that spaceship and he would do the painted backdrops on glass and hold them in front of the camera, but it would look like the background. That was so old-school, but you had to be good at that to pull it off. Even the cheesy stuff was made with no money and no time and it's still impressive.

RF Were the scenes of your character Harry Trent lost in space passing time scripted or did you get to develop that with Piper?

MM I don't have a script around but I don't think there was anything scripted. If I had an idea, Brett would go, "Okay." I want to draw on the pillow. "Okay." I want to draw on the wall. "Okay." I think the food he gave me was frozen tater tots, which were just easy to improvise with. That became a whole afternoon of just doing stuff with tater tots. It was just being so clowny. I don't know if it matched the rest of the film, but we just kept going further and further with all that. We had fun. He built such a fabulous set to play in. It was like a claustrophobic jungle gym. He was really a very nurturing and open director. Any proposal, he'd listen to it and he was pretty much going to go along with it unless it was totally not in line with his vision. I remember when I got there I went out and bought a gray suit. I wanted to look like James Coburn in **In Like Flint**. That's what I had in mind when I got out there. He was like, "No." He grabbed a leather jacket off Robin Lovett, the AD, and I threw it on. I had a T-shirt and that was fine and I had a second pair of pants and that was fine. That was the costume from beginning to end. There was no change of costume. That was his idea for the character, the look he wanted.

RF Most actors agree that nude scenes and scenes involving special effects are notoriously difficult to shoot. You fought a stop-motion creature in the buff?

MM I was totally game for it. I'd been in some films and I used to be a real fan of going down to the old 42nd Street in New York City and just seeing double-feature and triple-feature horror films. But as I started working on films, I began to become sensitive to the sexism involved, which as an audience person I was, "Sure, it's great!" With an actress, it felt different and it really sensitized me. I was all for flipping the tables. Trent's the one naked instead of Ms. Australia Denise [Coward]. "Let's do it!" Then we're in this garage, I guess it was fall in New Hampshire, and, you know on **Seinfeld** the term "shrinkage?" It was cold. My one concern was, "Can they see anything?" The other thing, of course, this was going to be a PG film. So how do you shoot this? [Piper's] idea was, I was brandishing a torch in front of my penis, while doing all these crazy stunts. That was a little bit terrifying, I have to say.

RF What can you say about the cast you worked with?

MM Everyone was totally game. It's not like it was a cushy environment. You're roughing it and it's about as bare-bones as it gets, but everyone was really enjoyable—even the extras, the harem women and the mutant people, which were often just friends of Brett's or people from the crew



Actor Matt Mitler in his heroic Harry Trent days.

putting on makeup. Everyone was really fun. Brett's fun. He has a really dry sense of humor. I think people were just having a kick. I mean, Joe Gentissi (Mad Dog Kelly) and Helene Michelle Martin (Toni), they were improvising and creating stuff and having a really great time. Working with the two of them was really, really fun. Denise, I think, was just like, "What the hell is going on here?" But she was game, totally, totally game. Bill MacGlaughlin, the crazy scientist at the end—I was doing stand-up comedy at the Improv in New York and he was an Improv guy I knew really well. I guess whoever Brett had couldn't do it or dropped out and he needed someone in two days, one of those kinds of things. I suggested Bill and Bill said he could do it. I thought he was going to do a much more extreme characterization, but he played it pretty much to the bone. He was there and he was on it, too. Everyone was just there.

RF Any amusing behind-the-scenes stories about the production you can share?

MM One of the things on that film, you also see all these crazy fight scenes. Those were all just created on the spot usually. Joe and I with the axes, we were just, "Let's try this. Let's try that." This is not in the film, but I blocked his attack, his axe, and it broke the shaft and the blade just snapped off and landed on my head! There was a little time-out there. I always did my own stunts. I learned early on in acting if any director asks you if you can do something, you always say, "Yes." Brett asked if I could ride a motorcycle and I went, "Yeah!" Then the horse. "Can you ride a horse?" "Yes!" I hadn't ridden a horse in maybe fifteen years. I really couldn't get on it, so we just went for comedy there, too.

“Because I do impersonations, Brett asked if I could do Cameron so I would have to fill in a clean word for where he said something horrible.”

**Matt Mittler on
Cameron Mitchell**

*RF What was the production of **Mutant War**, Piper’s first film shot in 35mm, like?*

MM The 16mm he could carry around. It was so portable; you could do so much with it. He even had, I think, a little wind-up Bolex for some shots. 35mm involved more work and more time. I know he was more stressed-out. He was doing everything. It was nothing to be in the middle of a shooting day, which was every day, and he’d say, “I’ve got to go to the airport to pick up film. Matt, direct the scene,” or “Matt, light this.” I mean, you’re on your own for some chunk of time. It was that small of a team. But the thing that was great for me was, there was always something to do. You’re not sitting in a trailer. You see something falling over, you run over and grab it. You see someone’s prosthetics coming off, you go and fix it. Plus, Cameron Mitchell had to be taken care of on another level, so there was a way of sort of looking after him which we all benefited from to a certain extent. As a participant in the project where you’re not relegated to a specific role of, “I only act. I only have lines, only in these particular scenes.” I’m there the whole time, just seeing what I could do to help because it was fun and interesting.

RF Did you enjoy returning to the character Harry Trent?

MM It was like, “I’ll do anything with you, Brett.” It was great. We’re back to this character! Brett wasn’t expecting it. Everything was [at] a little more professional level, I’d say. It was a different sense of things.

RF What was it like working with Cameron Mitchell?

MM He was just a blast. I spent every chance I had with him. I heard these stories of old Hollywood. He was in the original **Death of a Salesman** on Broadway. That, for him, was the highlight of his life. He found out I was a writer and he said, “I want to do a sequel. I want to do **Son of a Salesman!**” I thought, that’s okay, that’s an interesting idea. What am I going to say, “Yuck!” So, I mean, that’s where he was. He had his fee. If you met his fee he would do the films. He wasn’t going to see **Mutant War**. He wasn’t seeing any of the films he was shooting, just one after an-

other. But, no complaints. There’s one scene where he’s sitting there and he’s talking. That crazy helmet he had on was a little bit big and it started to slip down his face. It slipped down and it slipped down. It covered his eyes, it’s over his nose and he’s still doing his lines. He would also improvise like crazy. He was always saying, “c̸cksucking” and swearing his pants off. It was a special challenge in the editing process. Because I do impersonations, Brett asked if I could do Cameron so I would have to fill in a clean word for where he said something horrible. He was just a kick. I really, really enjoyed him a lot.

*RF What do you remember about the production of **The Mutilator**?*

MM It got heavy while filming and I started having nightmares about my friends getting killed. We needed to blow off steam, and probably would have no matter what, so we started playing pranks on each other. Once I put Bill Hitchcock’s severed head in his closet. We also got a lot of mileage out of Ben Moore’s head. The scene where I was stabbed in the leg, my leg was in a hole in the floor with a fake leg attached to my body. When I was in there, I couldn’t move. It was my birthday when we filmed that, so once I was in the set-up and couldn’t get out, everyone crowded around and sang “Happy Birthday” to me. We had food fights. We were such a group of delinquents. Then we found out the crew was even worse! They’d party hard every night but never with the cast—until after we found out, that is. I remember how the whole crew cheered me on when I asked to run laps around the field to get all hyped up for the car running over Jack, and me realizing it was my father. By the way, that was my adjustment of the line to add the “Jesus Christ!” One funny thing, when I got stabbed in the leg, the pants had a thin cut in them rigged to split on contact and gush blood. We got one try at it. Camera ready, everyone was in place. Buddy showed Jack [Catham] exactly where to stab the pants with an axe. Jack says, “Here?” and touches the blade to the pants and “pop!” The bag bursts and there goes the blood. Buddy yelled, “Roll film!” We went to see **The Mutilator** with a lot of the cast who came up from North Carolina, and Jack Chatham, who played the Mutilator, was in the audience. I couldn’t resist. I was sitting a row or so in front of him. At one point I turned around and went, “It’s the Mutilator!” I pointed at him and this whole row of girls basically left their seats, screaming and jumping in the air. Then I did it again in the lobby another time we saw it and I turned around and pointed at him and said, “The Mutilator!” and this whole crowd just sort of separated from him. Jack almost fell to the ground.

*RF You bring a high level of energy to your roles, so much so I think it brings everyone in the scene up with you. I’m thinking of the way you and John Bachelder play off each other in the pharmacy in **Deadtime Stories**.*



Matt Mittler in full werewolf mode in scene from **Deadtime Stories**.

MM I don’t remember if he was even an actor. I always threw stuff into everything I did. I’m sure I was throwing him off if he had his lines memorized. I remember finding a way after meeting him on the set for the first time—how do you make a connection there and make something happen. If someone’s good, they’re going to look for every opportunity to enjoy themselves.

*RF Do you have any stories to share about working with Frank Henenlotter and that great cast on **Basket Case 2**?*

MM Yeah, they were all really great. Annie Ross was particularly exceptional. Again, I got such a kick out of her. Here’s this famous jazz singer and [she’s] just taking the piss out of that part. And the special effects guys. I always had a fondness for the special effects guys from **The Mutilator**, and Brett doing his own effects, just what they’re doing there with the body and making molds and creating things. **Basket Case 2**, they were just going to town they had so many creatures to create. The variety was just really wonderful. I couldn’t get away with improvising as much with Frank as I did with Brett. He also wouldn’t let me wear the wardrobe I chose. I had a Malcolm X T-shirt that said, “By any means necessary” and he vetoed that. But there was still a lot of play. [Frank] is a real funny guy and a real knowledgeable guy. With his breadth of film knowledge he could beat anyone in film trivia. It was a fun set. The house was built and you’re in the house. That sequence when I pop up in the attic and there’s all these creatures there, the whole laughing thing was an improv on my part because I went, “What else would you do in that situation?” This is not green screen. This is not stop-motion. They’re really doing it, really coming at me and it was just the reaction that came out of me, which I’m happy with now.

“There were explosives in my crotch and on my head.”

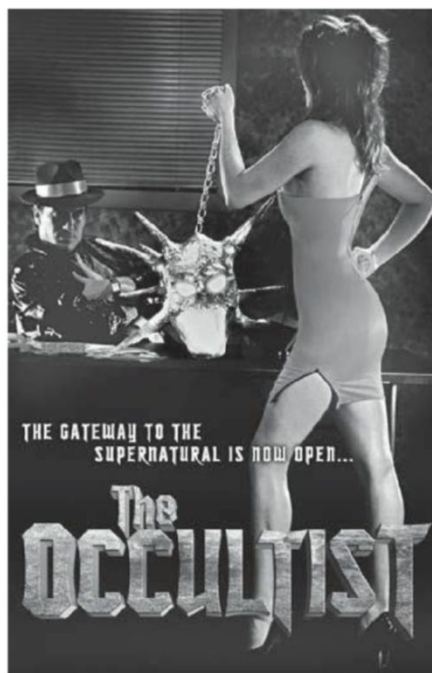
**Matt Mittler on
*Maximum Thrust***

RF The way the scene was set up with the camera flash going off like lightning and the “specials” are coming closer and closer, was really fantastic.

MM Yeah. I mean, I’ve got to say, that was brilliant. It was really something. That was a hard scene stunt-wise. There have been some really hard stunts in a lot of these films, but it was a kick.

RF What was it like working on those Tim Kincaid films?

MM Oh, my God. For him it was like, if something didn’t work out, “Next!” There was no redoing anything no matter how bad it was, no matter what went on. Again, they’d be fun people in terms of the cast, but stuff that was shockingly bad on a certain level that I guess it was good for an audience that just wanted to razz a film. He would get extras that knew nothing. I don’t know if they were getting paid or not, but they had never worked on film. They didn’t know how to be an extra on a film. He’d have them all grouped together for some sort of crowd. Then he would shoot reaction scenes and he’d say, “Look to the left. Look to the right. Look up. Look down.” Then he would just cut it in wherever he needed it, but they would have no expression on their faces. It could be someone whose body just blew up and they would all turn to the left, but they would have no reaction to it. It was hysterical.



*cal. I got to do, I think it was called **Maximum Thrust** (aka **The Occultist**) and, you know, it’s great playing a really bad guy. It was Colonel Esteve. I got to do some mean sh@t in there. Then I got this fabulous but terrifying death scene where I get shot from below a catwalk, through my crotch and out the top of my head. There were explosives in my crotch and on my head.*

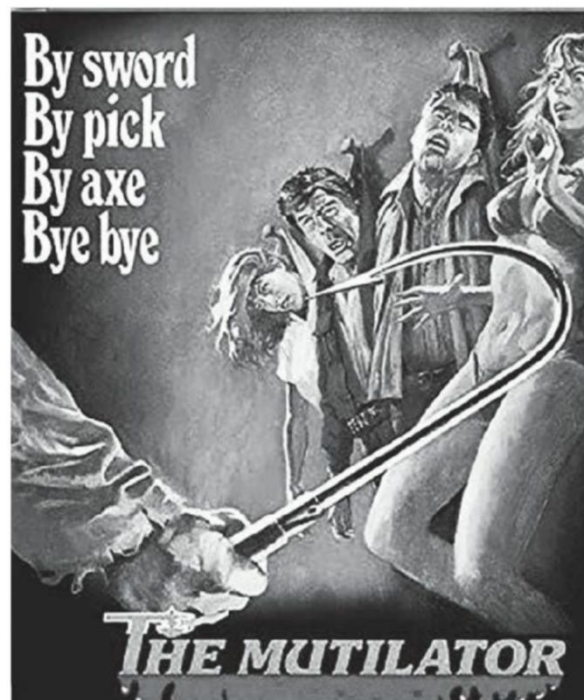
RF You were in a lot of independent features from 1984 to 1990. What was that time in your life like?

*MM If I had more of a goal, I might have done better in that world. It was just, “Oh, look what’s happening here.” I was doing comedy and theatre and directing a lot in the city and teaching and I would go out on audition for something. I had a pretty great agent at the time, who didn’t get me any of this stuff. I would send out for something if I thought it looked interesting. Once I did **The Mutilator**, the first feature I did, my name got out there in that B-movie horror world. For **Basket Case 2** they called me up and asked if I wanted to audition for it. I turned down a few films, but if it seemed like it could be a good experience, I took it. I wasn’t, “When’s my next film coming, What am I doing next?” But pretty much it just rolled in, one after another. Brett asked me to do one more film, **They Bite**. It would have been fun, but I was doing a comedy show at the time.*

RF Were you ever recognized out and about as the films were released theatrically and then released to home-video and cable?

*MM Pretty much no, except for a few times. When **The Mutilator** was playing I used to love going to see it on the Deuce because it would be packed. It played for, I don’t know, a month or two months. It was really fun to watch with a crazy crowd. You know, a stoned, drunk, screaming crowd. I would go into the balcony, which was the wildest. I’d walk into the cinema usually halfway through the film, when the deaths started happening, and I would scream along with the crowds. That was so much fun. But in going to see that film, every now and then someone would recognize me, sometimes in a way that was a “What?” I remember one guy, he was at the popcorn stand and he said, “You’re that guy in that film!” I said, “Yeah, yeah.” He said, “How’s your leg?” It was, wow, you really are missing it there. Then once I got recognized in front of a porno theater on 8th Avenue for **Deadtime Stories**.*

*RF Your IMDb credits you with an uncredited role in Sean Cunningham’s **Spring Break** (1983).*



*MM The original title for **The Mutilator** was **Fall Break**, which was a terrible name for a horror film and then a film called **Spring Break** came out and they decided to change it and it was for the best all around. But I had nothing to do with the Cunningham film. There are films on that IMDb list I don’t remember. Every now and then someone sends me [a message], “I found a poster or a flyer of a film that you were in.” There’s my name and for the life of me I don’t remember anything. I was doing a lot of stuff where I’d come in for a day and do some part and I don’t remember it.*

RF Did your early film work influence and guide you to directing your own film?

*MM Brett’s films more than anyone’s. I directed theater since I started acting and that was very fulfilling to me and I was passionate about that, but film is a different breed. The experience I got working with Brett really kind of filled in a lot of blanks for me. It also exposed me to the horrors of it, like how incredibly demanding it is and difficult and the variables that ensue. I mean, you have so many variables in theater. Then when you’re on location, or even on set, you’re dealing with everything else that’s happening. The variables are multiplied exponentially. It’s crazy. What’s fascinating is the bigger the budget, the more variables there are. Moving up to, like, **Basket Case 2**, there’s more things going wrong. There are more problems to solve. There’s more, “Oh, how do we do this?” I’ve just done small stuff on really big films, but you see that when everything goes to a standstill for half a day or a day. So yeah, really, really, really valuable.*

*RF What can you tell us about your 1991 film **Dick and Jane Drop Acid and Die**?*

MM That just got shown in Seattle. From the comedy clubs, I shifted to what they call performance art in small theaters and night-clubs. There started to be a crew that I really liked working with and we would create stuff together. Someone came up to me and said, "You're doing some videos, you're doing improv, but you couldn't improvise a film." I said, "You can improvise a film." He said, "You can't do that." And I said, "I'm going to do that." I called my friend Robert Prichard, who I've known since high school. He did **The Toxic Avenger** and some Troma films. He's done the whole B-movie circuit, too. He had a camera and he was into this sort of stuff. I told him we were going to try something. We called it **The Movie of the Month Club**. The idea was, we'd have some really sparse scenario and we're going to shoot in sequence in one day. We are going to improvise all the dialogue, then we edit it as long as it takes and then we do another one the next month. I directed six or seven of these. The first was **Kid Scarface** and then we did **Maniac a Go-Go** and then **I Was a Teenage Bride of Christ** and **Dick and Jane Drop Acid and Die** and **Les Enfants Miserables**, which was our French surrealist epic. The titles were all stand-alone videos presented under the umbrella title of **The Movie of the Month Club**. Once Rob Prich-

ard created Surf Reality, that became the producing entity. The individual videos were any length from about 40 to 60 minutes. Once we started having fun with it and getting into it, we said we're going to make a film this way. Not that we're going to improvise all the dialogue, but we're going to shoot down and dirty with locations that, for the most part, are all next to each other and use this stable of actors that are so incredibly creative and great at working together. So that led to shooting **Cracking Up** (1994). There were no auditions. Our cast came out of that world and the parts were basically written for them, although they were all allowed to improvise.

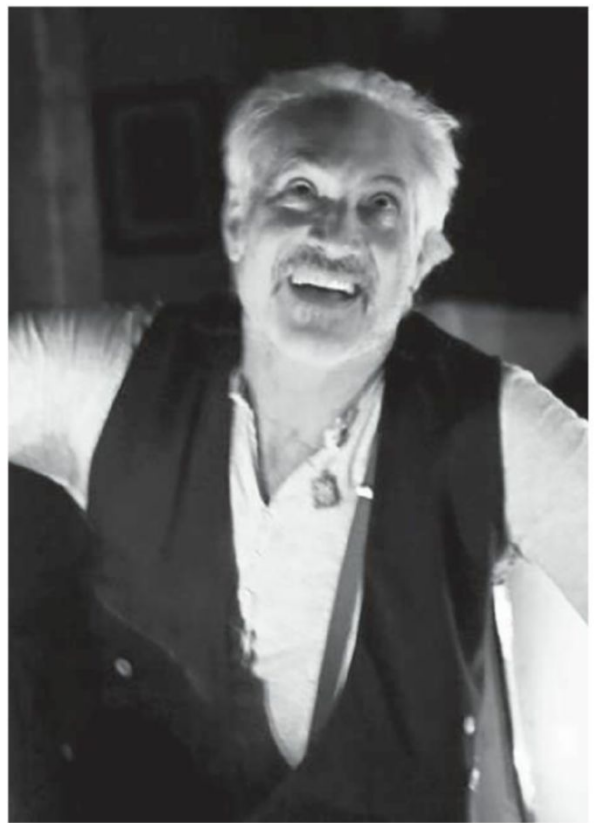
RF Were they shot on video or film?

MM The **Movie of the Month Club** films were shot on 8 and then High 8 when High 8 came around, then **Cracking Up** was shot on 16mm and blown up to 35mm. They're all on VHS and we're talking now about uploading them and trying to get them out there where people can find them, or get the masters, which I have, and transfer them to DVD. That was the

real film school for me, because I had to go, it wasn't just working on set and on location, but then I had to take that stuff into an editing room and learn how to do that sort of stuff.

RF Your most current film is **Virginia Obscura**.

MM That was [for director] Toby Osborne, from London, I think, and he contacted me for an interview for some fanzine. Then he did a review of **Cracking Up** and this was his first film. He said he really wanted to work with me. There were three parts, these kidnappers with burlap sacks over their heads. No one ever sees them. He was shooting it in Canada. He couldn't afford to bring me there but he could afford to have me, from my home, record the voice and send it to him. I told him to send me the script and I liked it. It was a good, clever, simple concept. I read the three different voices and I thought, "Damn. They're all interesting in their own way." So I said, "You know, what if I could do three voices so distinct you didn't know it was me? Then you could pay me what you'd pay two other actors and I have a blast." He went with it. I really worked hard. I gave him various choices for each voice. I really tried to differentiate them.



Matt Mitler at work in a recent theatrical production.

RF What are your thoughts that all these years later your early films are still out there and available to be seen in various formats?

MM It's cool. I was always pretty critical of my work. The first time I saw **The Mutilator**, which I thought was a film with all kinds of faults, I hated what I was doing, and I didn't think anyone was going to like it. I'd never seen myself on a forty, fifty-foot movie screen before. Now, looking at **The Mutilator**, I'm going, "That wasn't so bad. There was a moment there. I made that up." So, I'm seeing stuff now that I go, "Yeah, okay." It brings back a lot of memories of the collaborations and camaraderies that were going on with those films. Most of them were incredible. **The Mutilator** was sort of a camp and everyone's living together on the beach. I think it was supposed to be three or four weeks and it ended up like six or seven weeks. A lot of relationships came out of these films. It's really fabulous. Maybe there's some films I haven't been able to see myself that now I'll be able to see. ✂



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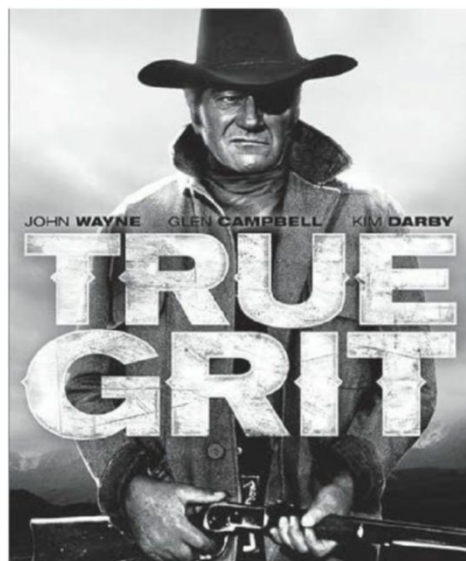
Axes and Picks with VS Crits
Tim Ferrante & Scott Voisin
GRIT EXPECTATIONS

The summer sizzles as our fractious critics pit Henry Hathaway's **True Grit** (1969) against the Coen brothers' 2010 remake. It's John Wayne vs. Jeff Bridges! Kim Darby vs. Hailee Steinfeld! Elmer Bernstein vs. Carter Burrell! It's...it's...why, it's a singularly shattering shootout of prodigiously preachy proportions!

Scott Voisin **True Grit** tells the story of Mattie Ross, a wise-beyond-her-years teen whose father was killed by a farmhand named Tom Chaney. When local law officials refuse to pursue the murderer, she's left with no choice but to ask the notoriously cantankerous and hard-drinking marshal Rooster Cogburn for help. LaBoeuf, a Texas Ranger on Chaney's trail for a different crime, offers his services as well, and the trio heads into Indian Territory in search of justice. Having never been exposed to **Grit** in any form (both films are based on a novel by Charles Portis), I went into the original expecting just another routine, run-of-the-mill western featuring the Duke and his trademark swagger. I was wrong: It's a solid movie all the way around, at which point I found myself doubting how Joel and Ethan Coen could improve upon it. Boy, was I *really* wrong! The flicks are 90% identical in terms of story and dialogue, but the Coens found a way to make a good film great.

Tim Ferrante The **True Grit** films are excellent for different reasons. Based on Portis's popular 1968 novel (originally serialized in *The Saturday Evening Post*), it's a difficult story to screw up when cast with top-tier performers. So, is the Coens' shorter 2010 version "better" than Henry Hathaway's longer 1969 Academy Award winner? Nah. It's no better or worse. John Wayne nailed a Best Actor Oscar (his lone career win) for his Rooster Cogburn portrayal. Jeff Bridges was nominated but lost. Both ably conveyed Cogburn's distastefully lovable charm within the context of each film's tone. I couldn't choose either as a favorite. Kim Darby and Hailee Steinfeld as Mattie? C'mon. Sensational performances. Both Glen Campbell and Matt Damon as Texas Ranger LaBoeuf are terrific, but I'd give Campbell the edge. His LaBoeuf is an appealing presence whereas Damon's is simply "there." I felt the remake would have benefited had the character been given a lighter spirit.

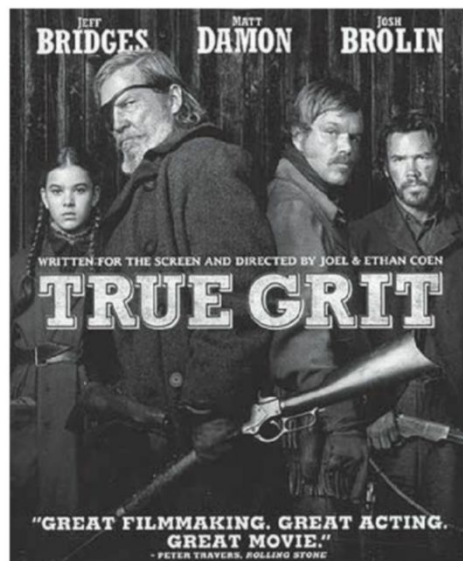
SV So let me get this straight. In your ancient eyes, both movies are essentially equal, but if you had to choose a deciding factor that



would put one flick ever-so-slightly above the other, it's the portrayal of LaBoeuf? He's the least interesting character in the film! The man is a walking plot device who shows up when needed while the hero fights the villain and the damsel is in distress. Granted, Campbell was a good singer, but his acting didn't exactly lead to new career opportunities on the silver screen. Damon does the best in a thankless role, and the Coens even manage to make LaBoeuf seem more essential to the story. Despite Wayne's Oscar win (which has some merit but strikes me more as the Academy rewarding a body of work four-decades deep rather than for this single performance), Bridges brings Cogburn to life in ways that Wayne could never dream of. Had he not already won the Best Actor award the year prior, Bridges would've definitely been on stage—gold statue in hand—thanking the Coens for their unique vision.

TF You've an impressive set of observations there, Kreskin. I'd no idea Bridges would've won Best Actor 2010 had he not won same for 2009. And I didn't know Wayne's win was, "rewarding a body of work four-decades deep rather than for this single performance." I wish I had your insight. The original film has three larger-than-life "stars" embodied in one person: John Wayne (iconic actor in an atypical role), Rooster Cogburn (Portis' best-selling creation) and Wayne's unbridled portrayal (the actor succeeding beyond anyone's imagination). I remember the buzz of the time via my "ancient eyes." The public and his peers adored him and the movie. Re: LeBoeuf "is a walking plot device." Thanks, Captain Obvious. Damon's portrayal is flawless *and* colorless and fits the Coens' darker take. Without delving into the business side of why Campbell was cast, the original is of a different era. Its atmosphere is vibrant and positive. Campbell's performance and appearance are almost dashing. It fits. And it's more interesting to watch. The two films are impeccable.

SV While I don't truly possess the gift of prophecy, Tim, I do have knowledge and common



sense, two traits you seem to be lacking. In 91 years, only five actors have ever won back-to-back Oscars, proving the Academy likes to spread the wealth around. And do you really think the governing body hasn't tried to make up for past errors by handing out some compensatory statues? Martin Scorsese won for **The Departed** and, while it's a fine movie, it's not nearly as masterful as **Raging Bull** or **Goodfellas**. Al Pacino was nominated—and lost—four years in a row for his work on the first two **Godfathers**, **Serpico** and **Dog Day Afternoon**, but his scenery-swallowing performance in **Scent of a Woman** was just too good to go unrewarded? I don't think so. Look, I agree both **Grits** are accomplished pieces of filmmaking, but when you compare them side by side, there's no doubt the remake is superior. Whether it's the acting or aesthetics (Roger Deakins' cinematography is absolutely breathtaking), the Coens took good material and raised it to a whole 'nother level.

TF We're discussing two **True Grit** films here, not Best Actor stats or Academy politics. As I said, this is a rare remake instance where neither film is better. Each captures the heart and soul of Portis' story via contrasting screenplays. The Wayne version was by Marguerite Roberts, a 64-year-old writer who churned the novel into Tinseltown ice cream. While the Coens utilized it as their template, they reversed several aspects of her handiwork to match that of the novel. For example, Roberts switched the focus from Mattie to Rooster. The Coens switched it back. They also jettisoned Roberts' opening scenes, condensing several minutes of exposition into about four lines of Mattie's narration. The two screenplays are thematically opposite with all of the Coens' turnarounds perfectly suiting their dreary and death-ridden vision. Roberts' happier changes were typical of a major studio. Ironically, Hollywood circa 1969 was experiencing the cultural shift that has since directed us toward the Coens' storytelling way. Nevertheless, these are two beautifully crafted films with dramatically different tastes. Just choose which flavor you prefer: Vanilla or chocolate. ☘

BRANDON LEE THE CURSE OF THE CROW

By Jon Polito
and
Scott Voisin

It was 25 years ago that rising young action star Brandon (son of Bruce) Lee lost his life on the seemingly cursed set of Alex Proyas' *The Crow*.

In the following excerpt from Jon Polito and Scott Voisin's forthcoming book *Unicycling on the Edge of the Abyss*, late, great character king Polito shares the inside story behind that tragic event.

After shooting the first six episodes of *Homicide* for NBC, I went back to Los Angeles and was immediately offered two roles. One was for a movie called *The Crow* and the other was for a cameo in the Coens' film *The Hudsucker Proxy*. Both productions were going to be shot at the same time at the same studio in North Carolina, so it was a no-brainer for me to do both.

The Crow was based on a comic book about a man who is viciously murdered and comes back to avenge his and his fiancée's deaths. The character they were offering me was named Gideon, a man who ran a pawn shop and was selling stolen goods. My wardrobe consisted of a very loose-fitting gray sweater that was distressed to look incredibly old and worn and a shirt that was coffee-stained and kind of disgusting. I looked like I smelled, and my hair was a mess. He was a disturbing character that was also familiar: the creepy guy audiences would immediately recognize.

When I arrived in North Carolina, there was a darkness that seemed to hover over the production. The first evening on the set, a young man in his mid-to-late twenties was driving a motorized vehicle used as part of the lighting system. As he was moving it onto the lot, the vehicle fell forward into a hole and threw him into the air, where he landed on an electrical pole and was electrocuted. There was a huge flash of light, and it shorted out the whole studio. The first moments of the shoot were clouded by this horrible accident, but whatever negative feelings we all might have felt were gone because of the sweetness and positive attitude of Brandon Lee.

Brandon was more than just the son of Bruce Lee. He was a promising actor with a lot of potential, and although he was very skilled in the martial arts, he was determined not to let that be his defining attribute. When he walked onto the set, you could tell he was

excited to be there. He was a happy guy playing an incredibly dark, depressed and angry character, and while he was scary-looking in the makeup, as soon as this lovely man would speak, his beautiful voice and wonderful demeanor immediately put you at ease.

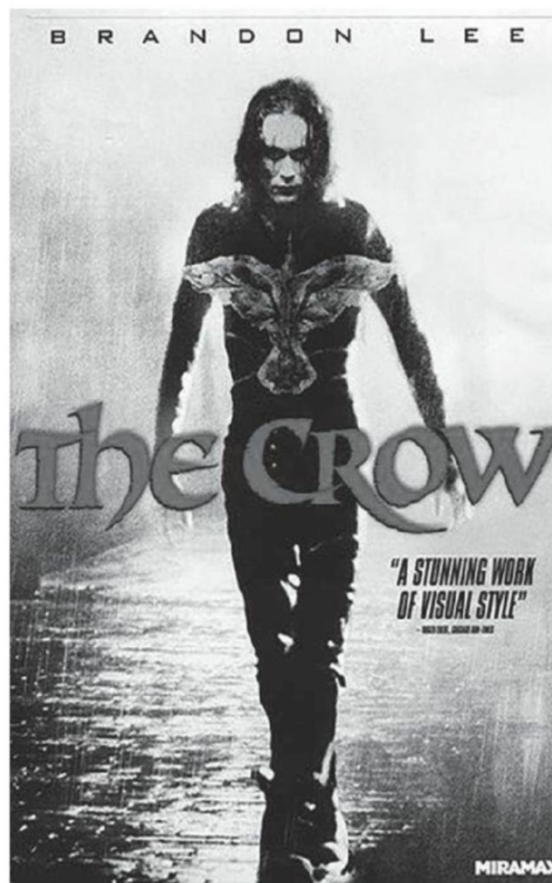
The first major scene I shot involved Brandon breaking into the pawn shop and confronting me about having his dead fiancée's engagement ring. As we rehearsed, he smashed through the sugar glass, which is a prop that looks like the real thing. On the first take, Brandon burst through the door and started coming towards me, and I noticed blood on several areas of his body. As soon as we finished the shot, I yelled, "This boy is bleeding!" People immediately rushed over and started to patch him up, and he was as perky as could be, acting as if nothing was wrong. A few minutes later, he came up to me and asked, "How do you think that went?"

I said, "Brandon, I don't like that you were hurt. I know you're going to do your own stunts, but please don't pull a Vic Morrow." I don't know why that came out of my mouth, but it did. Morrow was a wonderful actor who was killed by a helicopter that crashed on top of him and two young children during the filming of *Twilight Zone: The Movie*. I was always mindful of that story because it brought up the issue of how far some producers and directors will go to get the shot, regardless of how dangerous a situation might be. It was the first thing I thought of when I saw Brandon bleeding, and I think subconsciously I needed him to at least be aware of it.

The second night of the shoot we were back on the street set, and as we were sitting around, we noticed a lot of smoke. Suddenly, people started running around screaming that the prop truck was on fire! Thankfully, nobody was hurt, but in the end, nobody could figure out how it started. Two nights of shooting and already two accidents...I was sure these were omens.

With the prop truck blaze under control, we focused on the task at hand, which was filming the bit where my character is blown out of the pawn shop in an explosion. My stunt double was going to fly through the air, slam into a brick wall and then fall to the ground while on fire. The gag went off without a hitch, but when he landed, he turned and started to run. The head of the stunt department said, "It looked good, but I don't know what we're going to do about that last part."

I went to our wonderful director, Alex Proyas, and asked, "Do you need something more here?" He said, "Well, we're going to have a hell of a



Brandon Lee as *The Crow*, his final, fatal film role.

time cutting it together unless you do the end of the stunt yourself." I had a lot of respect for stuntmen—they always made me look better than I actually was—so I felt if I could do something to help make the illusion convincing, I'd do it, and I volunteered my services to Alex.

The head stunt guy wasn't really happy about the situation. He never liked using actors for anything, but he reluctantly agreed to let me do the shot. My legs were covered with an anti-flame gel and then wrapped in some kind of safety material. I wasn't actually going to fly through the air, but I was supposed to jump-land into frame and then react when I noticed my legs were on fire. A few of the other stuntmen came over and said, "Look, your pants are going to be lit just before we start the shot. If it starts to feel hot, yell 'Hot!' and we'll come put you out."

As the lights were being set up, I practiced how I would move, trying to figure out my character's reaction to being on fire. When the cameras started to roll, I nailed my jump, stuck the landing and then looked down to see the flames dancing on top of my legs. I was absolutely petrified and started to scream "Hot!" while doing a little jig and hopping out of frame, which was nothing like I planned to do. It wasn't acting, it was real. That's Jon Polito on fire, and not in the best theatrical way. In fact, that one take was all we got because I couldn't go through it again. Although it doesn't look like much on camera, it *burned*.

“All of these seemingly random acts of bad luck were happening too frequently to just be dismissed as coincidences.”

Jon Polito

A couple of weeks later, things got weird again. There was a hurricane coming. I had never been through one in my life, and although I'd seen footage of them on television, actually being there when the storm hit was insane. Cape Fear was getting battered by intense wind and rain, and the water kept rising and rising. In fact, it began to spill into our hotel. There were a lot of alarms going off, and out of curiosity, I dashed into the elevator and went down to the lobby to see how bad things were. As soon as the doors opened, I saw a body of water quickly filling the lower part of the building. The employees shut down the elevator, effectively stranding everybody for the rest of the night. Part of the hotel lost electricity, and since the refrigeration system was knocked out, the manager decided to open up the restaurant. They moved the tables into an area that wasn't flooding and began making food. Everyone was sitting around eating and drinking as we rode out the storm for a full night at the Holiday Inn Cape Fear. The next day, once the water started to recede, we were able to check out the aftermath. Sure enough, a few of **The Crow**'s sets were heavily damaged. In my mind, all of these seemingly random acts of bad luck were happening too frequently to just be dismissed as coincidences. My last day on the film, I had to complete a scene with Michael Wincott, Bai Ling and

Tony Todd. After Wincott confronts me, he pulls out a sword and shoves it through my throat. I'm not dying fast enough for him, so he then takes a machine gun and shoots me. I thought this was going to be the coolest death I've ever had on screen—and I've had many—but I felt nervous and uneasy. We were shooting on the fifth floor of this old, creepy factory, and it was as dusty and dirty as could be. It was already uncomfortable in there, but it was made even worse by the memory of something that happened during **Crime Story**. On that shoot, there was a scene with an explosion in an elevator shaft in an old building, and it went haywire. It was completely uncontrolled and ended up doing some real damage. I was later told that whenever dust builds up over many years, the flames become much stronger. With this information in the back of my mind, I was nervous about the muzzle flash that was going to come out of the gun barrel, fearing it might start a fire. I was also concerned because I was going to be wearing squibs, which are the explosives that make it look like you're being shot. They planned on putting eight or nine of them on my chest, but since I was only wearing that stained tee shirt underneath my sweater, I wasn't able to add any layers of clothing to help protect me from the squibs being detonated.

That night's shoot went on and on and on. We were in the sixteenth hour of filming, and during a break, I spoke to the gun wranglers, who were old acquaintances of mine. They didn't seem very excited to be shooting this late, nor did the special effects people who were setting up my squibs. Everybody was really tired, but the producer was pushing the cast and crew to continue. I asked the wranglers to show me what they were going to use for the machine gun in my death scene, so they brought out what they call one-half blanks. They fired a couple of shots, and I was freaked out by how much flame came out of the barrel. It was way too much, so they tried one-quarter blanks, and I didn't like that, either. I felt weird...Something about the gun just didn't seem right. It scared the hell out of me, so they went to one-eighth blanks, and I still wasn't happy. I approached the producer and said, “I think we should wait until tomorrow to film this. I don't feel safe.”

“There's no way,” he replied. “You cost too much money to keep for another day.”

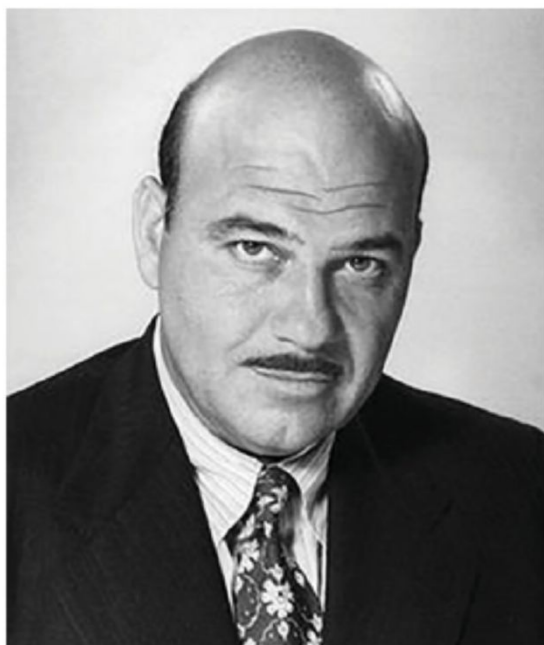
“I don't care, I'll do it for free. We've been here sixteen hours, everybody's tired and we haven't even started this



scene yet.” The producer refused, which pissed me off, so I said, “Fine, but I don't want any kind of blanks used in the gun.” He was furious, but the wranglers backed me up because if an actor says he doesn't feel comfortable, they won't proceed until a resolution is reached that satisfies everyone. We shot the scene—without any blanks—and the special effects went off without a hitch, although my chest was burned by the squibs.

Brandon told me how important **The Crow** was to him. He said they were filming a movie about his father's life—**Dragon: The Bruce Lee Story**—and he was asked to star in it. He told them no because he wanted to distance himself from his dad's legacy and forge his own path, and this was an opportunity for him to do that. From there we segued into a conversation about the famous “curse” on the Lee family. It was one of those stories that was passed down over the years—I certainly heard about it when I was younger—but now that I was working with the son of Bruce Lee, I felt like that curse was hanging around the edges of the film.

With my scenes completed, I went back to Los Angeles. Less than a week later, I heard the horrible news that Brandon was accidentally shot and killed on the set. I was devastated. He was such a wonderful young man who had just begun to show his potential as an actor. I was also convinced the movie would never see the light of day because there were still some important sequences that Brandon never got the chance to complete. However, through the magic of Hollywood, the film was finished and released, and it was quite a success that many fans still hold in high regard to this day. ✂



Late, great character king Jon Polito.

BEST OF THE FESTS: BOSTON UNDERGROUND FILM FESTIVAL

By
Joseph Perry

The 21st Boston Underground Film Festival, held at the Brattle Theatre and Harvard Film Archive from March 20–24, came through with another excellent assortment of transgressive and outsider cinematic fare, along with some as of yet little-known international and homegrown features that deserve to find a wide audience.

The independent science fiction/horror shocker **Assassinaut** is an absolute blast and, though its budget may have been low, it reaches high and delivers kills and thrills galore, all the while with a huge heart beating. Sarah (Shannon Hutchinson) is one of four teenagers chosen to go from Earth to the space station where the President of Earth (Irene Santiago) resides. She has been living there since ordering a nuclear strike 10 years earlier to wipe out invading extraterrestrials. Unfortunately, the strike also claimed the lives of many innocent civilian Earthlings. Great unrest continues on Earth, and surviving aliens and humans who sympathize with them rise to make matters worse. Sarah and her teammates—quiet observer Charlie (Jasmina Parent), loudmouth rich kid Tom (Johnathan Newport), and scientific genius Brooke (Yael Haskal)—are generally optimistic about their mission, though many of the adults surrounding them see it as a mere feel-good publicity stunt. No-nonsense Commander (Vito Trigo), who is in charge of the quartet, makes it clear that he feels the youngsters have no business being in space and coldly predicts they will all die there. Sure enough, disaster strikes on the space station, and the children and a few other survivors find themselves stranded on a nearby planet. The proceedings get goeey with well-executed gory effects and flying limbs, and writer/director Drew Bolduc ratchets up the suspense ever further, weaving seamlessly between different styles of genre-movie thrills. Hutchinson gives an outstanding turn as Sarah, showing a wide range in her portrayal as a strong, level-headed young lady. Bolduc and his cast play things straight, leaving room for occasional humor, and deliver some touching emotional scenes. **Assassinaut**, from Ultra Fuschia Films, mashes together several types of genre styles in its lean, 80ish-minutes running time. Highly recommended, it has assured itself a place on my list of the best genre films of this year.

The Swedish disaster film **The Unthinkable** is a stunning work filled with chaos, mystery, and beautiful cinematography but is slightly hampered by somewhat unsympathetic characters with whom it is hard to connect. Overall, though, it is a masterful achievement, even more so when considering its approximately USD \$2.2 million budget, much of which was raised through crowdfunding. It looks like it had a much higher budget, especially with such set pieces as a huge car pile-up and a helicopter crash. Alex (Christoffer Nordenrot) is a moody, brooding, arrogant musician who has been estranged from his father Björn (Jesper Varkselius) since his teenage years. Alex also left behind romantic interest Anna (Lisa Henni) at that time. Several years later, Alex's mother dies amidst puzzling disasters in Sweden, and when he returns home to tell Björn, he crosses paths with Anna again. Björn has become a paranoid conspiracy theorist who has his own ideas about why enigmatic disasters are occurring. Starting out as a family drama focused chiefly on those three main characters, **The Unthinkable** builds up slow-burn style into a full-fledged disaster flick, while keeping viewers as much in the dark as its characters about what is happening. This mystery is delightfully tantalizing, and when the action kicks in, it does so to thrilling effect. Although Nordenrot, Varkselius, and Henni are all strong in their performances, the characters each have reasons for viewers to hold back on fully rooting for them, with Alex often coming across as little more than whiny and rude. The rest of the film is such a grand achievement that it outweighs this problem, though. Director Victor Dannell (as Crazy Pictures, the name under which he also co-wrote the screenplay with Nordenrot) has crafted a phenomenal motion picture destined, like **Assassinaut**, to wind up on my list of top genre films of 2019.

The social media satire **Clickbait** falls short for this reviewer in its stabs at both comedy and horror. Granted, I am not the target audience for a film that attempts to skewer the millennial-era cult of personality in the online world of content creators addicted to clicks and seeking monetization as well as fame. But I have enjoyed recent genre efforts in this area, such as **Tragedy Girls** (2017) and **Cam** (2018), so the concept is not lost on me. Bailey (Amanda Colby Stewart) is potentially about to set a record for most weeks with the number one video on hosting platform Str33ker, but her dream crashes when a girl with cancer displaces her. To make matters worse, she is soon stalked and filmed by a giallo-like villain sporting a white Donald Trump mask in an obvious nod to the William Shatner mask in **Halloween** (1978). Bailey's long-suffering friend, roommate, and camerawoman Emma (Brenda Aguiar) and inept detective Frank Dobson (Seth Chatfield) try to help uncover the stalker's identity. The comedy is broad here, so poop jokes, grating commercials for toaster pastries,



and scenery-chewing abound. Although Stewart's performance eventually won me over, Aguiar and Chatfield played things too over-the-top for my taste. Co-directors Sophia Cacciola and Michael J. Epstein perhaps aim at too many targets for a single movie.

A film that nails comedy and horrific tragedy is **Mope**, a deep dive into the behind-the-scenes world of the lowest rungs of the porn-video industry. The title is a negative term that refers to porn star wannabes. Steve Driver (Nathan Stewart-Jarrett in a remarkable performance that goes from hilarious to heartbreaking, and many places in between) and Tom Dong (Kelly Sry in a great comic turn) are losers in life with big dreams of becoming superstars in the adult entertainment industry. Although they spend a great deal of their waking hours watching adult videos, they are clueless about appearing sexy on camera and about what they will need to go through to be offered even the least desirable roles in such productions. Brian Huskey is spot-on as Eric, owner of a low-budget adult video company that caters to such fetishes as getting kicked in the testicles. What starts out as a buddy comedy about two misfits takes a dark turn as it shines a light on the discrimination, abuse, and other negative factors of the pornography business. Although **Mope** is based on a true story (very loosely, from what I can tell), I did not know this going in, and I recommend that potential viewers avoid seeking out the actual details first and attempt approach it as cold as possible. **Mope** is funny, sad, and shocking stuff. It won the festival's Bacchus Award for Best First Feature.

On the subjects of giallo and porn, those two elements are combined in the French/Mexican/Swiss co-production **Knife + Heart**. Unfolding in France's underground gay adult film world of the 1970s, director Yann Gonzales' feature feels at once experimental and wholly accessible. From the opening kill with one of the most original weapons in recent horror films, viewers are in for an unsettling treat bathed in lurid primary colors and set to a splendid synthesizer soundtrack from M83. Alcoholic porn producer/director Anne (Vanessa Paradis) is having a difficult time because her girlfriend and editor Lois (Kate Moran) has broken up with her. As if that weren't enough, Anne's gay cast members are being murdered one by one by a killer wearing a leather mask and a trenchcoat. With the local police not offering much help, Anne and her game cast and crew attempt to solve the crimes themselves, simultaneously finding inspiration for a new blue noir film, **Homocidal**. Paradis is superb as Anne, throwing herself into full melodrama mode. Nicolas Maury is also exceptional and hilarious as Anne's main actor/director Archibald. The screenplay by Gonzales and Cristiano Mangione isn't without its problems, including a bit of messiness and untied loose ends, but the duo makes up for any shortcomings with heartfelt sympathy toward their characters, even giving the murderer a tragic backstory.

Industrial Accident: The Story of Wax Tracks! Records is a documentary about Jim Nash and Dannie Flesher, the couple who opened an alternative record store in Denver in the 1970s, then reopened it in Chicago and built their brand into a labor of love record label that influenced America's underground rock scene in the 1980s and beyond. Directed by Jim's daughter Julia Nash, the film is equally strong when focusing on both the two men who started an influential business where punk, gay, and other non-mainstream customers found like-minded people, as well as their eventual record label and the bands Nash and Flesher introduced, including Ministry, My Life with the Thrill Kill Kult, and Front 242. The director's home movie footage of her father, Flesher, and the Chicago store give the film an intimate feeling, and video clips and live performances from the label's heyday keep things loud and lively. The talking heads involved include such instantly recognizable musicians as Jello Biafra, Al Jourgensen (Ministry), David J (Bauhaus), and Trent Reznor (Nine Inch Nails). **Industrial Accident: The Story of Wax Tracks! Records** serves as a fine primer to those little familiar with the Wax Tracks! scene and an engaging peek behind the curtain for those who are already fans. ☿

PHANTOM PHEEDBACK (continued from page 6)

NOIR WAY TO TREAT A LADY

Dear Phantom:

Re: clarification of your otherwise on-the-money review of **Woman on the Run** in the Spring 2019 issue. I'm a writer and co-editor of **Noir City**, the e-magazine of the Film Noir Foundation. **Woman on the Run** was indeed restored by the Foundation and the UCLA Film & Television Archive and released on Blu-ray by Flicker Alley back in 2016. FNF Prez Eddie Muller recently showed the restored version on his TCM show **Noir Alley**. Definitely a disc worth owning. Love the magazine and your book **Found Footage!**

—Steve Kronenberg, Millville, NJ

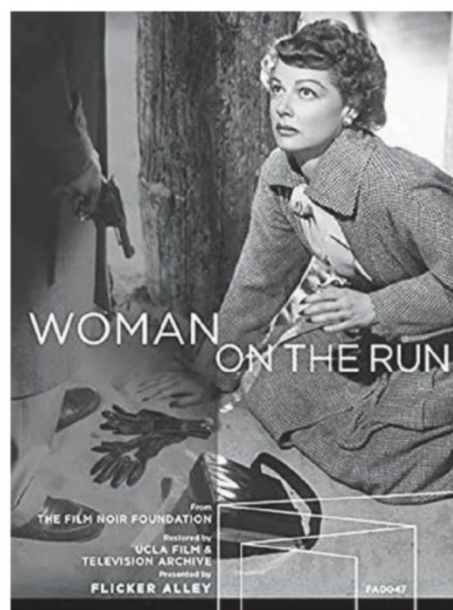
*Appreciate the info and endorsement! Will have to scope out the Blu-ray from Flicker Alley, the vintage film archivists who recently issued fresh editions of the silent classics **The Man Who Laughs** and **The Last Warning** Noir fans should tune in to **Noir Alley** Saturday midnights, with repeat airings Sunday a.m.*

HALLOWEEN SCENE

Dear Phantom,

Hmm...where do I start? So much to talk about. **Halloween** 2018 review was very interesting. It appears that Michael Myers' sister is gaining the advantage on her brother by becoming stronger. When Laurie fell over the balcony and Michael looked over the balcony she was gone. I believe Laurie at a future time will be a threat to be reckoned with. Of course, we have not seen the last of Michael Myers. I want to briefly talk about three movies I recently watched: **The Man Who Killed Hitler and Then the Bigfoot**. I was very disappointed with this movie and Sam Elliott needs to stick with westerns. I thought the concept was good, but it failed in many directions. **Replicas**—right on the mark, kept my attention. **Glass**—I don't know, a superhero that wears a raincoat? I wasn't impressed and the only thing I enjoyed is hearing the references to Superman and Batman. Now back to your magazine reviews. **Apocalypso**—very well-made movie. I felt I stepped out of a time machine and was back in the Mesoamerican period, a time period that is cloudy in our history books, but Mel Gibson gave us an idea on how these people lived. Bravo! **Doctor Who**—enjoyed reading the complete 11th series write-ups—very fun read. **Mega Time Squad**—this definitely has me curious. I will be watching! **John Wick Chapter 3**: I love the concept that in the Continental Hotel, it's a safe haven, a place where rivals can meet, talk and not fear retaliation. I also like it that Laurence Fishburne is in this movie and it sort of presents itself as an alternate reality from **Matrix** to **John Wick**. Thank you for another exciting read!

—Paul Dale Roberts, via e-mail



OUT OF TIME

Dear Phantom,

In issue 109, Peter Many was asking about incidents of different movies/TV shows being pushed back to a later time slot due to their horrific content, etc. Yes, it did happen here. The adult cartoon **Duckman** was pushed back from around 7:00 p.m. to 11:30 p.m. My kids weren't too happy about it. Other shows that had their times changed were **Freddy's Nightmares** and **Tales from the Crypt**. All three shows were subsequently taken off the air altogether. Those shows were pretty mild compared to nowadays. Take a look at **Family Guy**, episodes of blood, guts and whatnot. Makes me wonder why **Pop-eye** was ever taken off the air.

—Russ Bell, Stoney Creek, Ontario, Canada

HEAD'S UP

Phantom,

Just a quick note. In issue #110, there was a review of the Monkees movie **Head**. I agree, it is "long past due for a remastered, extras-enhanced Blu-ray revival." But it was released on Blu-ray in the **Complete Monkees Series** by Rhino back in 2016, the year of their 50th anniversary. The only extras are two theatrical trailers, five tv spots and a New York Action Trailer, a Portuguese trailer and audio commentary by all four Monkees (taken from the **America Lost and Found: The BBS Story** Criterion Collection DVD from 2007). It was a limited edition set, but I'm not sure if it's still available from Rhino or not.

—Tom Stillabower, via e-mail

Send your comments and queries to:

Phantom Pheedback
PhanMedia, L.L.C.
PO Box 216
Ocean Grove, NJ 07756
Or e-mail: phanmedia@aol.com



The Phantom's JOY OF SETS

TELE-VIDEO

SPACE IS THE PLACE

Martin Landau, Barbara Bain, Barry Morse and crew return in Shout! Factory's gala new Blu-ray edition of Gerry Anderson's pioneering live-action sci-fi **Space 1999: The Complete Series** (13-disc \$89.97). In addition to collecting the show's entire run, the set lands with a wealth of bonus material, including interviews with costar Bain, actor Nick Tate and director Kevin Connor, new audio commentaries with author Anthony Taylor and filmmaker Robert Meyer Burnett, vintage featurettes, interviews, promotional material and much more.

In other cosmic developments, 20th Century Fox launches the TV reboot of the hit '60s series **Lost in Space: The Complete First Season** (3-disc \$29.99 Blu-ray). Like the initial version, the show, starring Molly Peters and Toby Stephens, tracks the errant Robinson family in their off-course adventures in outer space. Among the extras are **No Place to Hide**, a colorized edition of the original pilot episode, multiple featurettes, including a set visit by original cast member Bill Mummy, deleted scenes and more.

READY FOR CRIME TIME

Acorn Media issues a pair of gala sets. **Trials & Tribulations: The Complete Series** (18-disc \$99.99 DVD) collects the entire run of one of Britain's most popular police procedurals. Created by Laura La Plante, the show stars David Hayman, Kate Buffery and Victoria Smurfit as dedicated investigators out to solve thorny cases. Extras include interviews with La Plante, Hayman, Smurfit and others, along with a documentary, behind-the-scenes footage and more.

Wire in the Blood: The Complete Series (13-disc \$69.99) casts Robson Green as a clinical psychiatrist who helps authorities locate and apprehend serial killers. Hermoine Norris and Simone Lahbib costar. Bonus material on Acorn's DVD set includes featurettes and image galleries.

The same label likewise issues **Agatha Raisin: Series 1 & 2** (4-disc \$29.95), starring Ashley Jansen in the eponymous role, plus **London Kills: Series One** (\$19.99), replete with featurettes and image galleries.



FILM FINDS

Mill Creek Entertainment and Kit Parker Films have more shadowy fun in store for noir fans with their 9-title **Noir Archive Volume 2** (3-disc \$29.99 Blu-ray): Idiosyncratic director/thespian Hugo Haas's cabin fever thriller **Bait** (1954), featuring frequent Haas starlet Cleo Moore and genre stalwart John Agar; Nathan Juran's convoluted **The Crooked Web** (1955), with tough guy Frank Lovejoy, Mari Blanchard, and Richard Denning; Andrew and Virginia Stone's hostage thriller **The Night Holds Terror** (1955), featuring Jack Kelly, Hildy Parks, Vince Edwards, John Cassavetes and David Cross (future Pax the clicker in **Creation of the Humanoids**); Arthur Lubin's **Footsteps in the Fog** (1955), not a noir but an excellent turn-of-the-20th-century-set British Technicolor thriller starring Stewart Granger as an uxoricidal cad and Jean Simmons as a scheming maid; Fred F. Sears' Caryl Chessman-based **Cell 2455, Death Row** (1955),

with William Campbell as a career criminal condemned to death row; Phil Karlson's heist caper **5 Against the House** (1955), with Guy Madison, Kim Novak, William Conrad, and Kerwin Mathews; a pre-gimmick William Castle's **New Orleans Uncensored** (1955), toplining Arthur Franz and Beverly Garland; Vernon Sewell's **Spin a Dark Web** (1955), with Faith Domergue, future **Surfside 6** tele-star Lee Patterson, and Martin Benson mixed up in authentically seedy Soho hustles; and Fred F. Sears' budget-minded **On the Waterfront** meets **Blackboard Jungle** mash-up **Rumble on the Docks** (1956), showcasing James Darren, with Michael (**Creature with the Atom Brain**) Granger as an ersatz Johnny Friendly.

Elsewhere on the film noir front, Warner Archive issues the standalone 1951 winner **Roadblock** (\$17.99 DVD), starring screen tough guy supreme Charles McGraw as a once-honest cop tempted by a wily dame (Joan Dixon) and seemingly easy dough, only to be undone by one fire extinguisher too many. Kino Lorber intros two sci-fi-based French suspenseers featuring American Eddie Constantine in Jess Franco's **Attack of the Robots** and as pulp shamus Lemmy Caution in Jean-Luc Godard's cerebral meta-caper **Alphaville** (1965), costarring Akim Tamiroff and Anna Karina.

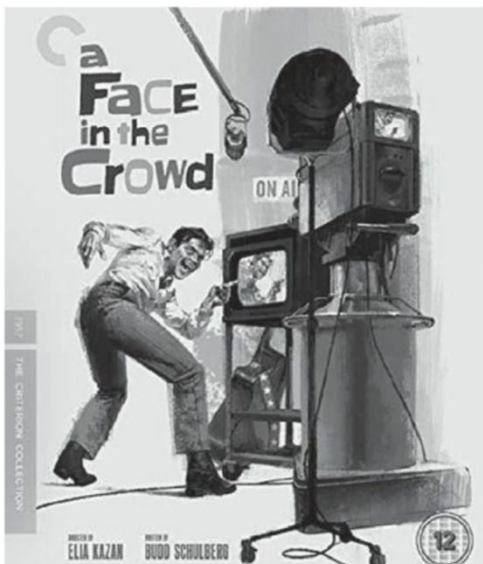


LAUGHS FROM THE PAST

Filmmaker/fan Peter Bogdanovich pays lavish homage to his screen hero Buster Keaton in **The Great Buster: A Celebration** (Cohen Media, \$30.99 Blu-ray), a deft assemblage brimming with classic clips, well-researched biographical info, talking-head tributes, and insightful analyses of the silent-film auteur's seminal oeuvre. Extras include lengthy conversations at NYC's Quad Theater, where the director shares further Buster lore. The same label issues **The Buster Keaton Collection Volume I** (2-disc \$39.99 Blu-ray), pairing Keaton's pioneering features **The General** and **Steamboat Bill, Jr.** Extras include the featurettes **Reflections on The General** and **Buster Keaton: The Luminary**, as well as trailers for both films. In other vintage comedy developments, Steve Coogan and John C. Reilly uncannily channel the eponymous comic icons in **Stan & Ollie** (Sony Pictures \$30.95), Jon S. Baird's brilliant, bittersweet account of the duo's last hurrah, a 1953 British tour. Extras include featurettes, cast and crew interviews, and more.

COLD WARRIORS

Mill Creek Entertainment recalls East-West tensions of yore with its six-film **Cold War Thrillers** set (2-disc \$14.98 DVD), a decade-spanning collection that kicks off with Andre de Toth's double-agent escapade **Man on a String**, with Ernest Borgnine in the title role. The action leaps to 1968 with a quartet of espionage films from that annum—Sidney Lumet's **Deadly Affair**, with James Mason,



STEVE COOGAN JOHN C. REILLY

STAN & OLLIE



Maximillian Schell and Simone Signoret, followed by Dick Clement's spoof **Otley**, starring Tom Courtenay and Romy Schneider, Anthony Mann's **A Dandy in Aspic**, featuring Courtenay, Mia Farrow and Laurence Harvey, and Vince Edwards and Diana Dors in David Miller's **Hammerhead**. 1970's **The Executioner**, directed by Sam Wanamaker and headlining George Peppard and Joan Collins, completes the set.

FACING UP

A Face in the Crowd (1957), director Elia Kazan and screenwriter Budd Schulberg's prescient parable of media star Lonesome Rhodes' (Andy Griffith) tragic rise and well-deserved fall, makes its Blu-ray debut via Criterion Collection (\$39.95). Previously known for his comedy work, Griffith is brilliant as the faux-folksy TV host, who becomes a national power broker, and receives top support from such reliable players as Patricia Neal, Walter Matthau, Lee Remick and Anthony Franciosa. Criterion's edition arrives with new interviews with Ron Briley, author of *The Ambivalent Legacy of Elia Kazan*, and Andy Griffith biographer Evan Dalton Smith, **Facing the Past**, a 2005 documentary featuring Griffith, Neal, Franciosa; Schulberg; and film scholars Leo Braudy and Jeff Young, an essay by critic April Wolfe, excerpts from Kazan's introduction to the film's published screenplay, and a 1957 *New York Times Magazine* profile of Griffith. **X**

MONDO LASLO

BLANK FRANK (2019) **X**

D: William Stancik. Alex Wood, Joseph Zumba, J. Gabriel Wagner. Bennie Rockum. Bradford Robinson, Wendy Jenasee. 89 mins. (Laslo Films)

Auteur Stancik and his Laslo Films crew, who'd earlier brought us **Jeremiah's Woods** (VS #107) and **Strippers and Blow** (VS #109), continue to expand their distinctive head comedy brand with **Blank Frank**, their most surreal effort to date. Hole-in-the-head comedy might be more accurate in this case, since our terminally clueless, put-upon protag, Fripp (Wood), suffers from an untreated ("I don't go to doctors") head wound inflicted by a random shooter. Said wound results in bloody pillows, strange dreams and the appearance of the diving suit-clad eponymous character (Wagner), a philosophical visitor from a parallel dimension where Fripp, he's told, lives an alternate life as a "debonair" bon vivant/political revolutionary. While Frank dispenses cryptic advice to our confused hero, Fripp's injury arouses the suspicions of OCD detective Lt. Mannex (Zumba), who accuses him of being the panty thief who's been plaguing the nabe. Mannex's ex-partner, Danny Boy (Robinson), himself the victim of a fatal head shot incurred while working an undercover case in drag, continues to accompany him on his police rounds. Also on the scene is eccentric agnostic priest Father Max (Rockum), who's determined to perform an exorcism on Fripp, preferably by fire. That's barely scratching the surface of the oft-inspired weirdness on view. Stancik also tosses in serial killers, aliens, masked wrestlers, bugs, drugs, dildos, split screen techniques and drive-in theaters, among other recurrent obsessions, for a truly unique descent into lunacy. The Laslo rep company members ably bring the bizarre proceedings to deadpan life, while animated sequences, collages, obscure vintage soundtrack tunes and splashes of psychedelica juice the audiovisual proceedings. Adventurous viewers will want to tune in. **X**

—The Phantom

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AT THE DRIVE-IN (2017) 8888

D: Alexander Monelli. Jeff Mattox, Virgil Cardamone, Matt McClanahan, Robert Humanick. 79 mins. (MVD Visual) 4/19

This lovingly constructed documentary looks at how special the drive-in experience is in general while specifically setting its sights on Pennsylvania's Mahoning Drive-in and the people who've gathered there. It's a David and Goliath tale as owner Jeff Mattox confronts the real threat of closing his beloved ozoner after Hollywood dictates all theaters must convert to digital projection as movies will no longer be available on 35mm film. When funds for the digital projector fail to materialize, Mattox decides to show only older films. When college students Matt McClanahan and Virgil Cardamone discover the theater, the trio forms a partnership and transforms the Mahoning into the ultimate retro drive-in. We watch these guys build the business, sleep on the snack bar floor and reach out to former employees to preserve the sanctity of the drive-in experience. Along the way we are introduced to a wonderful cast of characters, workers, and audience members, all people we recognize and relate to, their love for the theater moving some to drive six-and-a-half hours to volunteer on weekends just to be a part of it. If this were a movie solely about a retro drive-in, our heroes might be coming up with crazy shows and gimmicks to get ticket buyers away from the giant, corporate luxury theater down the street. Gross humor and pranks would fill the screen until the drive-in's exploitation orgy at season's finale with topless dancers and a band on the concession stand roof. By movie's end they would have earned the money needed to save the drive-in and put the corporate theater out of business. But life is stranger than fiction, and this family of alfresco film lovers keeps the drive-in amazingly alive and relevant. Director Monelli captures some special scenes with his subjects, particularly Mattox as he reflects on his life, remembering when his family had a birthday party at the Mahoning for him when he was a kid, then regretting not having a family of his own to introduce to the drive-in. It's a bittersweet moment that reminds us that sometimes life has different plans for us than we have for ourselves. Extras include multiple cast commentaries as well as a track by Monelli with cast member Humanick, deleted scenes, trailer and a director and cast Q&A after an Alamo Drafthouse screening. This terrific documentary reminds us that the way to preserve the past is to revisit it once in a while. As soon as it works its magic on you, you will feel like volunteering at the Mahoning, or at least putting a screen up in your backyard and showing *The Evil Dead* for as many people who can pile in next to the rusty jungle gym. 8

—Rob Freese

DRIVE-IN AUTEUR ALEXANDER MONELLI As Told To Rob Freese

Director Alexander Monelli describes his film *At the Drive-in* as a "hang-out movie," which it most certainly is. Monelli is a cinephile who loves movies. He subscribes to the idea that cinema is more about personality than story, which contributes to his uncanny knack for catching his subjects in some very honest, sweet moments. (Scope out monellifilms.com to learn more about his work and view a number of his short documentaries.) Here, Monelli shares his insights about the magic of the movies and the Mahoning. —RF

ROB FREESE What was your history with the Mahoning Drive-in?

ALEXANDER MONELLI I never went there until the first day of shooting. I started shooting at a drive-in in the town where I grew up in northeast Pennsylvania. I wanted to make a documentary about a drive-in or drive-ins. I love movies, obviously, and I think drive-ins are a cool way to watch movies. I started filming at this one drive-in and it really wasn't working out too well. Everyone there was nice but they weren't open like the guys at the Mahoning. They were older, they were more proper. It was more of a business. There was nothing interesting there. I always make the joke, "They were too professional for a documentary." A kid that I went to high school with said, "If you're looking for a drive-in, I go to this one every weekend, the Mahoning Drive-in. It's about an hour away." I researched it and I called Jeff, the owner, and talked to him. He was interested and I told him I wanted to come for a day to film and see what it was like and see if this could be something. Really my friend, who's in the film, James, introduced me to it. I did not know of the place until he told me about it. I'm glad he did.

RF How long did it take you to earn the trust of your subjects to get the more intimate interviews featured in the film?

AM Well, it was definitely a slow process. I went into it not really knowing what it was going to be. I was like, I'll just follow them around for a season and see what happens. Right off the bat they kind of opened up a little bit with me, but I could tell there was still some guard up. Anyone who goes there on a weekend to see a movie, I guarantee you, the experience you have when you meet them in person is just like when you meet them in the film, because they talk to everybody. They're super-friendly. They are generally just nice guys and girls. I made the teaser trailer and sent it to them and I was like, "I just want you guys to get an idea of what I'm doing, the tone, the feel, the look, everything." I feel like



Drive-in Ambition: Director Alexander Monelli focuses on the still-thriving Mahoning Drive-in.

when they saw that, and I'm not saying this egotistically, but it kind of blew them away. I don't think they expected that. I think they were thinking more like, "Oh, this will be something on YouTube, a blog or something maybe." I don't think they realized I was trying to make a movie. When they saw the teaser trailer they definitely bought it more and started opening up. All the sit-down interviews, not the ones where I'm sort of catching them running around, but the main sit-down interviews you see were all done after filming. I did that because I thought that, by that point, everything would be good. They'd open up and it worked. I feel that if I shot those interviews early on, Jeff may not have told that story about wishing he had a wife and a family, Virgil talking and getting choked up about his childhood and all that stuff. It definitely took three or four months. Matt was the hardest one to crack because he was approaching everything from a business point of view, and the fact that they slept in the concession stand was something he was very apprehensive talking about. He felt like it might draw some kind of red flag or someone might come and try to say this was illegal or whatever. I was like, "Dude, you're just sleeping in there, it's fine. People sleep at the drive-in, they camp out." But it took him a little while to open up to that. There were a lot of little things along the way that he tried to protect. But eventually we were able to pull the curtains off of them a little bit. It was a pretty long process.

RF The music played throughout the entire film has a whimsical, dream-like quality. Was that a conscious choice to use music that gave the film that dream-like ambience?

"You're just sort of stuck in this fantasy land and we only allude to the outside world."

Alexander Monelli
At the Drive-in

AM Yeah, definitely. Music is super important to me and I kind of approach it like Quentin Tarantino does, not to compare myself or my work to him, he's the master and everything, but he doesn't like a composer coming in and sort of altering, perhaps, what he saw through editing. Even Stanley Kubrick was similar. He would like to use finished, existing pieces of music. I went to my favorite music licensing site and it took a while. There were definitely different versions of every scene and every song. I didn't want the music to heighten the comedy. I wanted the music to accentuate, like you said, the sort of mystical, magical quality of the place. I wanted the humor to be sort of dry and you either kind of laugh at it or it's not funny. I didn't want a laugh track. I like where the music is sort of not what would normally go with what you're watching. With this film there were a lot of instances where I could have put in something more fast-paced or more modern. I wanted to play the music that way, where the content was much different in terms of the guys cursing a little bit and those scenes where you see zombie parts, so I thought it was a nice juxtaposition.

RF Did the focus of the film ever change at any point during production?

AM Well, there's a moment in the middle where Robert the movie guy, he talks to me behind the camera saying, "I heard you wanted to make a movie about drive-ins and then you decided to make a movie about *this* drive-in." And that was a very early-on decision. That wasn't something that happened midway through. I feel there have been other drive-in documentaries—*Going Attractions* is one. That one chronicles all these different drive-ins. Actually, what really made me focus on the Mahoning were two things. One, a French-Canadian documentary filmmaker put together a 60-minute piece and he interviewed some of the guys at the Mahoning. But he interviewed a bunch of different people at a bunch of different drive-ins. It was good. I really enjoyed it. But it interviewed so many different drive-ins in America and *Going Attractions* was there, I felt like, "What am I doing then?" I kind of figured the only thing I could do is tell this super-specific story about this drive-in and try to make it a microcosm for drive-ins in general, although it's really not, but also, using the drive-in, tell a singular, smaller story.

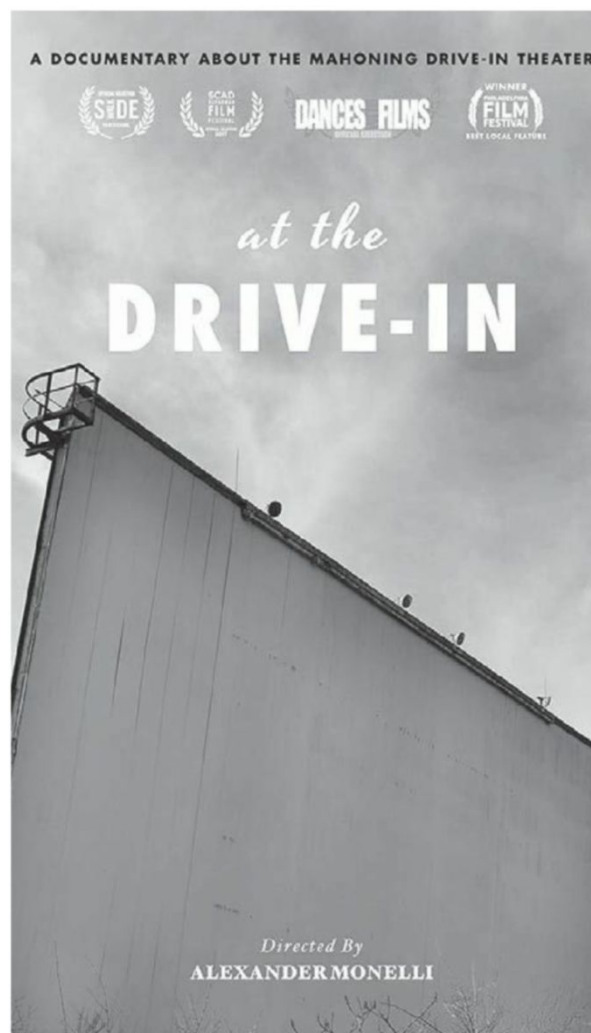
Then, as I was filming, I started talking to everyone more, especially on the last weekend. Chef Corey, he says, "My life is all over the place." They all mention how the drive-in is kind of an escape. Not just in jest. It really feels like they are going there to fulfill something that is sort of missing in the real world. It really became apparent as I kept watching interviews. That's definitely why I wanted to keep everything at the drive-in. It's like the *Wizard of Oz* if the *Wizard of Oz*, the entire thing, took place in Oz. You're just sort of stuck in this fantasy land and we only kind of allude to the outside world. That interested me. They all had full-time jobs on top of this. I felt that going there and showing them at the full-time jobs, I'd seen that before. It's like you watch a documentary about a struggling pro wrestler or struggling artist, it always shows them at their boring day job like they're kind of in *The Matrix* or something. So I felt, "Let's stay in *The Matrix*." And that's what led me to focusing on them and that's really how it kind of morphed throughout production.

RF Are you happy with how the film turned out?

AM Yeah. I'm happy with it. Obviously, I've seen it so many times now at screenings and whatnot, I understand George Lucas now. I wouldn't go back and do what he did to the original *Star Wars* trilogy, but I understand that urge. I understand seeing something and knowing, "That could have been better" or "If only I added this moment or this shot." All that stuff constantly runs through your head, so I understand George Lucas better after making this. I'm definitely proud of it. I didn't know what the reaction would be. I didn't know if Millennials would like it more or Baby Boomers. You have Jeff representing the Baby Boomers and Matt and Virgil are the Millennials. So I didn't know if it was going to play to one group or both. Honestly, I get as many comments from men and women in their sixties as I do in their twenties. That's pretty interesting, I thought. I'm proud of it, but there are definitely things I'm like, "I wish I could do that better or do that over."

RF What do you consider a perfect night at the drive-in?

AM Well, I recently went to the Mahoning with my wife, my sister and her kids. It was awesome. I just wanted to go see *The Wizard of Oz*. It's one of my favorite movies and that's why it's in the documentary. Again, I think it's a nice parallel with the film itself. Like I said before, the



whole film is kind of like in Oz, in a way, that sort of fantasy place. The movie-going experience is sort of a holy experience for me, if you couldn't tell. Whenever one of my favorite directors puts out a movie, I make sure I see it at the theater. If it's someone like Tarantino, I try to see it if he put it out in 70mm. Same with Christopher Nolan. I'll try to see it the way they want us to see it if I can. But at the drive-in, I want it to be vintage. I want it to feel like you're stepping back in time. So the Mahoning is obviously perfect for that. You know, going there, getting a spot usually up front. I always get a big bag of popcorn and a can of soda. Just sort of sitting outside and, you know, hearing nature. I don't mind hearing the cars in the distance. Where the Mahoning is, you'll sometimes hear animals in the distance. It's all part of it. My favorite thing is, I never bring a radio to the drive-in. You can listen in your car, but I like to sit outside, and this was awesome at the Mahoning when I saw *The Wizard of Oz*, so many people have their radios that you can hear the collective sound of everyone's radio. You can hear the movie that way. It really is immersive because you feel it and you hear it coming from all around you. I just love that. And I love just being out in the fresh air watching a movie. It's not something you normally do. And I have to have plenty of buttery popcorn. ☘

**Rob Freese's
DRIVE-IN
DELIRIUM!**

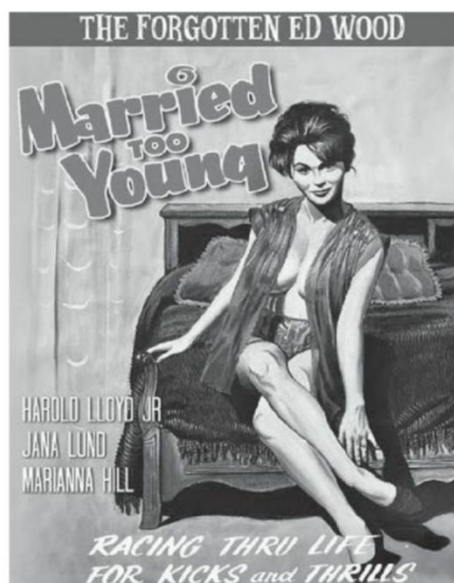
SINISTER CINEMA

DRIVE-IN DOUBLE FEATURE #104

ASSIGNMENT TERROR (1970) 88 1/2

D: Tulio Demicheli, Hugo Fregobese, Antonio Isasi-Isasmendi. Michael Rennie, Karin Dor, Paul Naschy, Craig Hill, Patty Shepard, Angel del Pozo. 85 mins.

Aliens come to Earth and inhabit the bodies of deceased humans in an effort to find new digs. They are led by Dr. Odo Warnoff (Rennie), who awakens an assembly of monsters in an attempt to overtake Earth after their own planet is deemed uninhabitable. He uses an ancient tome entitled *The Anthology of Monsters* to revive the nightmare creatures. They find the body of werewolf Waldemar Daninsky (Naschy), and Dr. Warnoff performs open heart surgery, removing the silver bullet from his aortic valve, no doubt put there by a woman who truly loved him. Once Daninsky is revived, he is Warnoff's slave and goes about helping locate and awaken vampire Count Janos deMialhoff, Dr. Farancksalan's monster and Egyptian mummy Tao-Tet. Meanwhile, Inspector Tobermann (Hill) is running all over the place trying to stop the space invaders and suffers bizarre "monster" hallucinations. Our tormented hero Daninsky goes along reluctantly until the love of a good woman convinces him to get to some monster busting and save the planet. This, obviously, was screenwriter Naschy's version of the old Universal monster rally flicks *House of Frankenstein* and *House of Dracula*. (For my money, those are some of the best of the Universal horror pictures.) Here the monster ante is upped by one with the inclusion of *The Mummy*. The plot moves fast and some of it takes place in a carnival. At one point Sam Sherman considered picking it up for a double bill when he needed a Frankenstein movie but ultimately passed when he found out it had been sold to AIP for television. (It may have played short theatrical engagements around the same time, as I've seen one-sheets for it over the years.) I have always found Naschy's love of monsters infectious and here that love is infused in every frame. This was Rennie's final film before he passed away. Aka *Dracula vs. Frankenstein*, this film has been confused with the Al Adamson flick of the same name for years. I find both to be extremely enjoyable and equally charming. *Assignment Terror* certainly harkens back to a simpler time when monsters, Martians and madmen stalked the giant outdoor screens under the star-filled summer night.



MISSION STARDUST (1967) 88 1/2

D: Primo Zeglio. Lang Jeffries, Essy Persson, Luis Davila, Pinkas Braun, John Karlsen, Ann Smyrner. 94 mins.

Space cowboy Major Perry Rhodan (Jeffries) jets into the cosmos with a crew of three headed to the moon to locate a uranium-like substance for the government. While hiking across the lunar surface, Rhodan discovers an alien spacecraft. He and his men are brought on board by robots. They meet Arkonides Crest (Karlsen) and the beautiful Thora (Persson), who tell them they've been stranded on the moon for months. Their planet is dying and the plan is to mix their alien race with Earthlings. Crest is sick and Rhodan's crew doctor diagnoses him with leukemia. The doctor says he has his anti-leukemia medicine back in his lab on Earth. Crest strikes a deal with Rhodan that if they get the meds, the Arkonides will help the Earthlings find the substance for which they are searching. Rhodan and his team are zapped back to Earth, but now super-villain Arkin (Braun) and his army of henchmen, who want the aliens' secrets, are stirred into the pot. Mix in some action, gunplay, more robots and an ear-piercing soundtrack and you are in for some rambunctious drive-in strangeness. This weird, spastic little sci-fi thriller pulls a bit of bait and switch by transporting our heroes back to Earth once they are on the moon, but it's still a wacky trip worth taking. The influences here are pulp sci-fi adventures, spy movies and war flicks. Jeffries makes for a great pulpy hero, while Persson fulfills the fantasies of any lovelorn space cowboy. The quality of the special effects are all over the board, and that helps add to the charm of this bottom-biller.

The Sinister Cinema discs are a complete night at the drive-in. Trailers precede the first film, then a 10-minute snack bar intermission plays, followed by the second feature and a reminder to return speakers to their posts. You can't go wrong with these wonderful discs, so stock up while you can. 8

**FREESE
FRAME
ED WOOD
DIVISION
By Rob Freese**

RETROMEDIA

(\$9.98 DVD) 3/19

MARRIED TOO YOUNG (1962) B&W

88 1/2

D: George Moskov. Harold Lloyd Jr., Jana Lund, Anthony Dexter, Trudy Marshall, Brian O'Hara, Marianna Hill. 76 mins.

High school race car stud Tommy Blaine (Lloyd Jr.) can't wait to get hitched to his gal Helen Newton (Lund). They're so ate up by the love bug and extreme horniness that, on a whim, they decide to drive over to the next county, where kids can get married without their parents' consent. They try to keep their nuptials a secret, but their first time out they accidentally leave their marriage certificate in a booth for an angry, aging soda jerk to find. It does not take long for their secret to get out. Pretty soon, Helen's uppity parents are housing the young couple like they're hiding criminals, her mom constantly worried about what the neighbors will think. In short time they land over at Tommy's middle-class parents' digs and life is no better for them there. Tommy starts taking more side hustles at the garage so they can get their own house. With a house comes the responsibility to fill it with all new things, and Helen proves herself to be a wonderful consumer, so wonderful, in fact, Tommy finally turns to a life of crime to keep up with all the payments. Obviously, marriage doesn't always lead young lovers down this dangerous path of consumerism and crime, but it does for Tommy and Helen. This is a really fun, goofy cautionary tale. Lloyd Jr. keeps his geek turned up to eleven throughout, and Lund shows she can burn up a dance floor once she gets her hips swaying. The surprise here is Hill as flirty friend Marla, who sees how happy Tommy and Helen are (?) and gets married too. (You should recognize Hill from *High Plains Drifter* or *The Godfather Part II* or at the very least '70s and '80s horror flicks like *Messiah of Evil*, *Schizoid* and *Blood Beach*.) Word is that an uncredited Ed Wood helped finish the script. (The flick's brutal and sudden wrap-up followed by a judge giving both sets of parents what-for could only have come from the wonderfully warped mind of Wood.) This is the best-looking version of this film available, and Retromedia rounds out the widescreen transfer with an alternate ending, further evidence of Wood's participation, trailers and a second feature, the Wood-scripted *The Violent Years* (1956). 8

Rob Freese's
**DRIVE-IN
DELIRIUM!
'70s STYLE**

BEYOND ATLANTIS (1973) ♂♂

D: Eddie Romero. Patrick Wayne, John Ashley, Leigh Christian, Sid Haig, Lenore Stevens, George Nader, Vic Diaz. 90 mins. (VCI Home Entertainment/MVD Visual)

When thug East Eddie (Haig) catches wind that poor boatman Manuel (Diaz) has a connection to pure, perfect pearls, he leans on him to reveal where the stash is located. Eddie hooks up with petty hood Logan (Ashley) and hires sailor Vic Mathias's (Wayne) boat to travel to a lost island where bug-eyed fish people are ruled over by Nereus (Nader), the leader of the tribe. The king wants his beautiful daughter Syrene (Christian) to mate with Vic and keep the fish people's bloodline going. Dr. Kathy Vernon (Stevens) comes along, too, and realizes the island inhabitants may be descendants of mermaids from the lost city of Atlantis. Of course, Eddie and Logan are roughnecks and their greed gets the whole

group marked for death. This is an enjoyable pulp adventure based on a story by former Roger Corman director Stephanie (Terminal Island) Rothman. Romero keeps the action moving and everyone seems to be having a good time, particularly Haig and Ashley as the heavies. Once Wayne was on board, his desire to make it a family-friendly affair overrode producer Ashley's wish to beef up the exploitation aspects by having all the female mermaids go topless. (Still, the picture will not seem very PG to today's audiences, especially when one character tosses a goat into a pond full of piranhas.) The blu-ray looks fantastic. Extras include a new commentary by film historians Howard S. Berger and Andrew Leavold, liner notes by Berger, copious video interviews courtesy of Mark Hartley, trailer and TV spots, pressbook and photo gallery. 46 summers after its debut on drive-in screens, *Beyond Atlantis* rises from the depths to continue to thrill audiences.

MAKO: THE JAWS OF DEATH

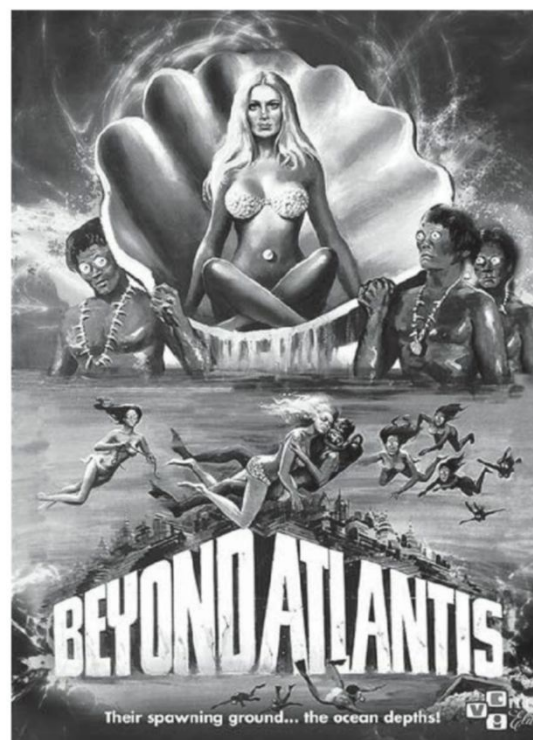
(1976) ♂♂

D: William Grefe. Richard Jaeckel, Jennifer Bishop, Harold Sakata, Buffy Dee, John Davis Chandler. 91 mins. (Bayview/RetroMedia)

Sonny Stein (Jaeckel) is a war vet with an affinity for sharks. When he's not feeding and talking to his sharks, he is attacking sleazy fishermen out hunting sharks for sport. Sonny has a short fuse and is prone to violent outbursts but he has a soft spot for Karen (Bishop), sort of a club dancer but instead of dancing she swims provocatively in a display tank over the bar. Scummy bar owner Barney (Dee) cons him into selling one of his sharks to put in the tank with Karen, and the nearby marine biology lab tricks him into loaning them a pregnant shark for "observation." Further enraged by two geeks who've been harpoon-fishing sharks and selling the carcasses to tourists, Sonny finally snaps and goes after everyone he perceives as an enemy, which is everyone else in the cast. Director Grefe delivers a strong drive-in revenge shocker that borrows more from his earlier snake thriller *Stanley*, as well as *Willard*, than it does from *Jaws*. Jaeckel, as always, is solid as our antihero. When Bishop turns on him, it's a heartbreaking moment, and you can't help rooting for the sociopathic dweeb. Heavy on shark and harpoon attacks, *Mako* emerges as a winner. An early '90s on-camera interview with Grefe, Italian trailer, and Super 8mm digest version round out the extra features on this drive-in classic from one of Florida's most legendary exploitation filmmakers.

THE SWINGING BARMAIDS (1975) ♂♂1/2

D: Gus Trikonis. Bruce Watson, Laura Hippe, Katie Saylor, Renie Radich, William Smith, Dyanne Thorne, Zitto Kazann. 90 mins. (Code Red)



Cocktail waitresses at the Swing-a-Ling bar are preyed upon by weird Kenny Rogers look-alike Tom (Watson), who follows Boo-Boo (Thorne) home and murders her. When the other waitresses arrive at Boo-Boo's apartment for a nightcap, they get a good look at the creeper. They give Lt. White (Smith) a detailed description and really talk about his eyes. Tom returns home, cuts his beard, dyes his hair, then goes down to the Swing-a-Ling and gets hired on as the dish-washing bouncer. (He basically changed everything about his appearance, except his eyes, but the gals never catch on.) When he fixates on Jenny (Hippe), he ends up with her at her parents' remote country home away from anyone who can save her. This is quite the strange drive-in shocker. The "swinging" in the title hints more of frolic and free-spirited nudity than it does misogynistic murder and mayhem. (I can only wonder what audiences who saw it under its alternate title *The Eager Beavers* thought of it.) The assaults on the women are quite mean-spirited. Effort is made to establish the characters, and we find ourselves hoping Jenny, the barmaid with the heart of gold, figures out what Tom's game plan is and snuffs the little weasel. Smith isn't given much to do until the end of the film when he turns his badassness all the way up to 11. Scripted by frequent Roger Corman scribe Charles B. (*Little Shop of Horrors*) Grif-fith, this would fall into the category I refer to as "drive-in dramas," wherein the film is presented as one thing, then a shocking, out-of-left-field twist changes it into something else, and everything is played out with deadly seriousness. (These movies morphed into slasher flicks in the '80s and then erotic thrillers in the '90s.) Code Red offers the HD feature with a trailer reel of other Code Red releases. This is a solid drive-in exploitation flick definitely worthy of a look. ♂



**Rob Freese's
DRIVE-IN
DELIRIUM!
HEMISPHERE
HORRORS**

SEVERIN FILMS

(\$49.99 4-disc Blu-ray) 4/1/2

HEMISPHERE HORROR

THE BLACK CAT (1966) 881/2

D: Harold Hoffman. Robert Frost, Robyn Baker, Sadie French, Annabelle Weenick, Bill Thurman. 72 mins.

Alcoholic Lou (Frost) and his wife Diana (Baker) live on Lou's adoptive parents' estate. Lou does little more than hang out at the local go-go club getting hammered. One night he finds a black cat and brings it home, only to suspect his deceased adoptive father has been reincarnated in feline form to drive him mad. Lou kills the cat, but it returns to life, and everything goes south for poor drunk Lou from that point forward. I know readers are well aware of Edgar Allan Poe's *The Black Cat* and its many cinematic incarnations throughout the years. Director Hoffman made this for no money in his Texas stomping grounds, and the result is better than one could or should realistically expect. The lead here, Frost, comes across like an intense community theater thespian who so totally believes in Method acting that he was drunk from the second the cameras started rolling. He does what he can with what he has to work with. Baker as his wife fares slightly better, if only because her character is not required to drunkenly flail around the go-go club dance floor. Weenick, a long-time Texas-based actress, was in a bunch of S.F. Brownrigg and Larry Buchanan flicks, like *Don't Look in the Basement* and *Creature of Destruction*,

usually under the name Anne or Annabelle Macadams. Another Buchanan stock player, Bill Thurman, shows up as the go-go club bartender. What this film lacks in genuine spine-tingling scares, it more than makes up for with one beautifully executed axe to the head murder, one of the gorier ones I've seen. I think it comes off as such a shock because it is the last thing you're expecting. As with most adaptations of this Poe story, the handling of the titular feline can be uncomfortable to watch, but we hope these scenes are mere cinema trickery, like that axe in the head gag. Hemisphere Pictures placed this on the bottom of the bill with the more polished *The Blood Drinkers*, delivering a night of thrills and chills that kept them screaming all summer. (Oddly, this is one of the only horror pick-ups that Hemisphere didn't add the word "blood" to in the title. *Blood of the Black Cat* has a nice Hemisphere ring to it.)

THE TORTURE CHAMBER OF DOCTOR SADISM (1967) 888

D: Harald Reni. Lex Barker, Karin Dor, Christopher Lee, Christine Rucker, Vladimir Medar. 84 mins.

Our story begins with the quartering of convicted warlock Count Frederick Regula (Lee). Before having his parts dragged all over the town square, Regula swears vengeance on his prosecutor and executioner. Thirty-five years later, Roger Mont Elise (Barker) is summoned to Regula castle in regards to his mysterious parents, who died when he was young. He shares a coach with Peter Fabian (Medar), a thief pretending to be a priest. They meet up with Baroness Lilian Von Brabant (Dor), also called to the castle, and her buxom companion Babette (Rucker). They travel through a trippy, haunted forest and arrive in time for Regula to be brought back from the dead so he can exact his vengeance and gain eternal life. This German chiller generously fulfills all the trappings of the "haunted castle/haunted fiend" genre and really comes to life in the scenes of the coach traveling through the forest. The mist-cloaked forest is like some weird funhouse attraction, with various body parts emerging from the trees. It is wonderfully effective and on par with some of the imagery created by Mario Bava and with what Roger Corman achieved with a couple of his Poe films. Lee is great, and it is always nice seeing him in something other than Hammer films. Barker does well as the dashing hero, while former Bond Girl Dor proves up to the task of taking care of herself. There are various torture devices, a pendulum and a green elixir that no doubt tied in well when the film was paired with *Mad Doctor of Blood Island* under the title *Blood Demon*. (The Oath of the Green Blood gimmick devised by distributor Sam Sherman performed double duty as it applied to both flicks on the bill.)



Severin's Hemisphere Horrors box is a terrific follow-up to the label's previous *Blood Island* box set. If you didn't pick up the earlier DVD releases years ago (all on Image discs) or are looking to upgrade to HD, you should seriously consider investing in this set as all the films receive an audiovisual makeover and a plethora of new special features. *The Blood Drinkers* includes an interview with script supervisor Dik Trofeo, an appreciation of Hemisphere by filmmaker David DeCoteau, a new commentary track by Nathaniel Thompson and Howard S. Berger, the previously released Sam Sherman commentary, deleted scenes, trailers and radio spot. *Curse of the Vampires* (aka *Blood of the Vampires*) includes an interview with actor Eddie Garcia, interview and commentary with Sam Sherman, new commentary by Andrew Leavold, deleted scenes, trailers and radio spot. Al Adamson's *Brain of Blood* (aka *The Creature's Revenge*) rounds out the box set and offers a *Memories of Blood* featurette including interviews with Adamson, Sherman, associate producer J.P. Spohn, actor Sean Graver and filmmaker Fred Olen Ray, the previously released Sam Sherman commentary, trailer and radio spot, all in blood-curdling color. *The Black Cat/The Torture Chamber of Doctor Sadism* disc is exclusive to the box set and trailers for each are included. Severin should be commended for these wonderful Hemisphere Horror releases and one hopes they continue and knock out maybe a Hemisphere War box or a Hemisphere Comedy box and get more of these great lost drive-in flicks in front of fans' eyeballs again. On a personal note, I would also like to mention the exemplary customer service Severin offers when you buy directly from them. I included a message with my order asking if I could receive the same numbered set as my *Blood Island* box. I didn't expect it, but someone read my request and made it happen. Little things like that will keep me coming back and collectors would do well to deal with Severin directly whenever possible. 8



Rob Freese's DRIVE-IN DELIRIUM!

SINISTER CINEMA DRIVE-IN DOUBLE FEATURE #175 CREATURE FROM BLACK LAKE (1976) ♂♂♂♂

D: Joy N. Houck, Jr. Jack Elam, Dub Taylor, Dennis Fimple, John David Carson, Bill Thurman, Jim McCullough, Jr. 95 mins.

Two University of Chicago students talk their teacher into putting up the bread and wheels needed so they can travel down to Louisiana and follow up on reports of a trapper recently killed in the swamps by a bipedal humanoid creature. Rives (Carson) and Pahoo (Fimple) are the students seeking trapper Joe Canton (Elam) for information about the Bigfoot creature seen around the swamps of Oil City. They luck into meeting Orville Bridges (McCullough, Jr.), whose parents were slain by the beast when he was an infant. Orville takes the Yankees to meet his grandfather (Taylor). Grampaw Bridges warns them not to mention the creature around his wife, who never got over losing her daughter to the beast. Well, as you can expect from a couple of Yankees (according to Grampaw Bridges at least), Pahoo mistakes a mule's bray for the creature's war cry and the elder Bridges runs them off. That night Rives captures audio proof of the beast. The following night the boys coerce a couple of local females into meeting them in their tent for beers when the beast makes an appearance. They spend the night in Sheriff Billy Carter's (Thurman) jail. Joe Canton comes raging into the jail, going on about the beast attacking his swamp shack, until he passes out in the cell with the boys. The next day they get Joe's story, then go out to where he thinks the beast is living. Once night falls, the creature ambushes the young city slickers during a terrifying all-night siege. For my money, **Creature from Black Lake** is the best movie about Bigfoot ever made. It is a wonderful character-driven piece that is easily paced, has a sense of humor, and drops the Bigfoot creature into the middle of all these wacky swamp people. Carson and Fimple are totally believable and relatable as the young anthropology students. They offer a really great dynamic, while Fimple has a couple of nice scenes where his character opens up about his past and his experience in Vietnam. Their performances are natural and help make their characters more endearing. Elam is given more to do here than make funny faces, and Taylor has some effective moments as the smarter-than-at-first-glance

hillbilly farmer. Thurman, a longtime player in Larry Buchanan's films, plays one of his most likable characters, a not-so-dumb sheriff who comes across tough on the boys from out of town but is still there to lend a hand when they are most in need. McCullough, Jr. does a good job as Orville, gets to sing a song with Taylor, and also contributed the script. I'm sure when this feature made the rounds back in '76 it helped launch a million nightmares for the kids who saw it. Director Houck, Jr. wisely keeps the monster in the shadows and shows just enough of it during the climax. It was produced by low-budget Texan filmmaker Jim McCullough, Sr. This version is the first time I've ever seen the film in wide-screen and it is absolutely gorgeous. Cinematographer Dean Cundey, just two years from loaning his distinctive style to **Halloween** (1978), opens up the swamplands of Louisiana and gives life to the rainy swamp nights. Drive-ins were created for showing movies like **Creature from Black Lake**.

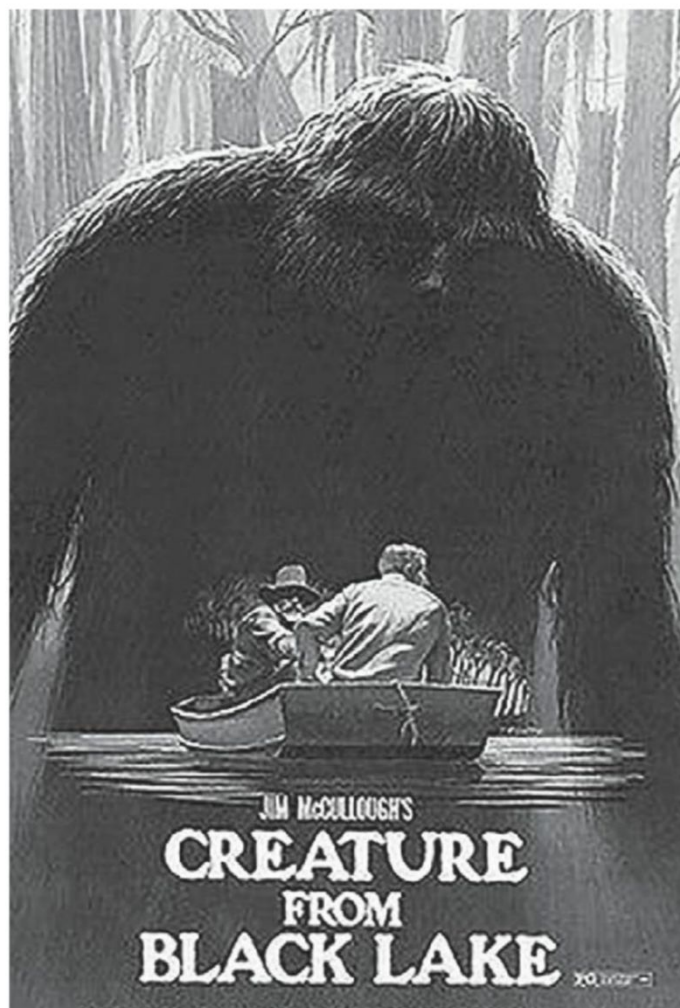
DEVIL KISS (1976) ♂♂

D: Jordi Gigo. Silvia Solar, Oliver Mathot, Jose Nieto, Evelyn Scott, Maria Silva, Daniel Martin. 93 mins.

Medium Claire Grandier (Solar) has ulterior motives when she comes to the castle of Duke de Haussement (Nieto) for a seance. De Haussement invites Grandier and Professor Gruber (Mathot) to stay and utilize his basement for their work. What he doesn't know is that Grandier and Gruber are cooking up some dimwitted zombies and using the beasts to get vengeance on the Duke. Mix in a dwarf, a horny housemaid, a creepy butler, and a not-so-bright detective in a Euro castle setting on a dark and stormy night and you pretty much know what you're getting into. Once the Duke is out of the way, his playboy nephew inherits the castle but allows Grandier and Gruber to continue their work in the basement, never once questioning what they are working on. Gruber suffers headaches from trying to manipulate his living dead creatures through mind control. When the horned-up stable boy goes to bed with his zombie girlfriend, you ask yourself if you've ever been so horny that

you wouldn't have noticed crawling into bed next to an ice-cold gray-faced ghoul. This Euro thriller hits all the right buttons for a bottom of a double bill filler. If you've been watching these flicks for a while, I'd say you've seen it all before and seen it done way better. (Following **Creature from Black Lake** doesn't do it any favors.) Director Gigo was also one of the co-writers on Paul Naschy's 1975 **Exorcismo**. If you run across this one in any of the reference books, it is listed as **Devil's Kiss** or **The Devil's Kiss**, but the title on the print is **Devil Kiss**. (It also made the ozoner rounds as **The Wicked Caresses of Satan**.) Presented here in widescreen, the print looks great and it does have its fun moments. They don't make movies like this anymore. Fans of European chillers centered around mad scientists, zombies and castle locales will want to stay awake and give it a watch.

As with the entire line of Sinister Cinema's Drive-in Double Feature discs, the show starts with coming attractions and the films are broken up with a full Intermission of classic snack bar trailers and commercials. There's no better way to enjoy a double feature than to cozy up on the couch with your date, drinks and a big bucket of popcorn and turn the clock back to when the drive-in was the only place to see these crazy horror flicks. ♂



CLARK'S LARKS

VINEGAR SYNDROME

(\$32.98 2-disc Blu-ray + DVD each) 2/19

UNINVITED (1988) 88/12

D: Greydon Clark. George Kennedy, Alex Cord, Clu Gulager, Toni Hudson, Eric Larson, Shari Shattuck. 91 mins.

In the opening moments we witness a frantic feline making a break from an ominous-looking research laboratory. We are then introduced to a gaggle of standard-issue spring breakers who end up being invited onto gangster Walter Graham's (Cord) luxurious yacht for the weekend. Unbeknownst to the girls, who insist on bringing along the kitty they found on the pier, the cat is actually a genetically-altered hell-spawn that waits until they are out at sea to start eating gizzards and faces. Ah, the '80s, when you could stick a bunch of bubble-headed college students and gangsters on a yacht and have a flesh-eating mutant cat tear them up for an hour and a half. The cast is great, especially Kennedy and Gulager as Graham's henchmen. The mutated monster cat effects are gloriously rubbery and gory. There are a lot of familiar faces onboard beyond the trio of instantly recognizable heavies. Boat captain Hudson paid her dues in teen comedies like **School Spirit** and **Just One of the Guys** (both 1985) and was in **Leatherface: TCM III** (1990) next. Longtime fan fave Austin Stoker (**Abby**, **Assault on Precinct 13**) shows up as a Caribbean police officer, while director Clark plays a doctor in the opening scene of the U.S. version. (His part is cut from the international edition. In that one he plays a fisherman at the end.) Extras include a commentary by Clark, the longer international version with more gratuitous college geeking and nudity, a chat with cinematographer Nicolas von Sternberg, trailer and reversible cover art. Now that Clark's films are being given these special edition HD releases, fans will be sure to snap them up.

WACKO (1982) 88/8

D: Greydon Clark. Joe Don Baker, Stella Stevens, George Kennedy, Julia Duffy, Scott McGinnis, Elizabeth Daily. 87 mins.

Thirteen years ago, after being screwed-up for life from witnessing her sister murdered by the Lawnmower Killer at the local high school's Halloween Pumpkin Prom, Mary Graves (Duffy) prepares for her own Pumpkin Prom and has big plans to lose her virginity to spazz boyfriend Norman Bates (McGinnis), who revs like a lawnmower when he gets excited. Meanwhile, after a breakout at the local mental asylum, overly-caffeinated detective Dick Harbinger (Baker) is on the scene with his briefcase full of coffee, tracking the killer that got away from him 13 years prior. Everyone is a suspect and



someone is leaving miniature lawnmowers in Mary's locker to scare her. This is a spoof on the then-hot trend of slasher movies that also jabs at classics like **The Omen**, **The Exorcist** and **Alien**, among others. Done in the style of **Airplane!** (1980), the rapid-fire gags come at you so fast the dumb gags die quickly and the good gags keep it moving. (Spoofs are an acquired taste and I love them, but I can understand that people who don't dig them could find this a chore to sit through.) As popular as slashers were in the early '80s, the spoofs had their moment, with roughly a half-dozen being released theatrically in a very short time span. The game cast here is composed of real pros, like Kennedy as pervy Doctor Graves (Doctor is his first name), Stevens as his ditzzy wife and the absolutely hysterical Baker, who steals every scene he's in and delivers a brilliant parody of the old "that fateful night 13 years ago" flashback cliché. New faces like Duffy, Elizabeth Daily and Andrew Dice Clay in his first screen appearance also give it their all. Although rated PG during its theatrical run as well as its initial VHS home-vid release via Media Entertainment, this new Vinegar Syndrome HD edition represents the film's R-rated version. In the opening when the killer carves his pumpkin mask, a voice-over (courtesy of director Clark) hears the killer say in a hushed tone, "Death to all teenagers who f---ck." This one word would have been enough to ensure an R, much like the similar spoof **Student Bodies** (1981), where the producer appeared on-screen to say the word to get an R rating so the film would be a success. (It worked!) Extras include a new commentary by Clark, an interview with cinematographer Nicolas von Sternberg, outtakes, trailer and reversible cover art. If you dig lowbrow juvenile humor and slasher movies, you'll be delighted with **Wacko**. (Clark's next was one of his most successful, 1983's video game fever flick **Joysticks**.) 8

—Rob Freese

Phantom Phlashbacks

GHOSTS OF MARS (2001) 88/8

D: John Carpenter. Natasha Henstridge, Ice Cube, Jason Statham, Clea Duvall, Pam Grier, Joanna Cassidy, Rosemary Forsyth. 97 mins. (Mill Creek Entertainment \$14.98 Blu-ray) 5/19

Arguably the best pure drive-in movie to beam down (or, more accurately, if unfortunately, crash-land) into American 'plexes back in 2001, **Ghosts of Mars** (aka John Carpenter's **Ghosts of Mars**) arrives as a non-stop over-the-top thrill ride that basically reworks the auteur's 1976 **Assault on Precinct 13** in an outer-space setting. In 2176, on a stark Mars colony a-swirl with ominous red dust and overseen by a military matriarchy, policewomen Melanie Ballard (Henstridge), Basjira Kinkaid (Duvall) and Commander Helene Braddock (the always-welcome Grier), along with testosterone-fueled token male Jericho Butler (Statham), search for legendary criminal James "Desolation" Williams (a snarling Cube), believed responsible for a massacre at a remote mining outpost. Turns out the culprit is a far more sinister force—the avenging collective spirit of displaced Martian aborigines who've appropriated the bodies of former miners, transforming them into Marilyn Mansonoid variations on George Romero's **Night of the Living Dead** zombies. So much for explanations. Carpenter quickly gets down to the real business at hand—extended rapid-fire confrontations between the relentless crazies and the endangered (but heavily armed) humans, complete with narrow escapes, gruesome demises and exciting chase sequences, all set to a throbbing heavy metal score co-composed by Carpenter himself. While this relatively modestly budgeted (a reported \$28 mil) throwback to such Carpenter classics as the above-mentioned **Assault**, **The Thing**, **Escape from New York** and 1997's **Escape from L.A.** failed to score with mall audiences conditioned to consume slicker, blander genre fare, action hounds will want to pounce on Mill Creek's new Blu-ray edition, which features a raft of extras—including an entertaining Carpenter and Henstridge commentary, the featurettes **Scoring Ghosts of Mars**, **Video Diary: Red Desert Nights** and **Special Effects Deconstruction**, for an evening of breathless escapism replete with witty subtexts and "old-school" underground edge (such as a scene wherein Natasha's politically incorrect use of recreational drugs literally saves her life). 8

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DRIVE-IN DIVA BELINDA BALASKI

As Told To
Terry & Tiffany DuFoe

California-born Belinda Balaski has been performing since the age of 5, when she first hit the stage. She made her big-screen debut in Jack Arnold's **Black Eye** (1974) and went on to join Joe Dante's informal rep company, appearing in **Piranha**, **The Howling**, **Grem-lins**, **Amazon Women on the Moon**, **Matinee**, and many more, including the recent fright anthology **Nightmare Cinema**. Belinda further established her drive-in cred with key roles in such enduring genre faves as **Bobbie Jo and the Outlaw**, **Cannonball**, and Bert I. Gordon's **The Food of the Gods**. Our dynamic dad/daughter duo, Terry & Tiffany DuFoe, caught up with the busy actress for the following update.

TERRY DUFOE *One of your first films was **Locusts** with Ronnie Howard. You got to work with Ron and, of course, his dad Rance Howard.*

BELINDA BALASKI Rance Howard played my father and Ben Johnson played Ronnie's father. But Ben and Ronnie were the stars of it, and Katherine Helmond played Ronnie's mother. It was back in the 1930s and there was a locust migration. We were farmers and they ate our crops. They didn't really have locusts, they had crickets! They brought in boxes and boxes of crickets. I lived in Iowa and we had a water bug migration that went through in the summer one year. We lived on the second floor, but when you turned the water on to take a bath or something, instead of water these water bugs would come falling out. It was really gross. If you went out you would have to wear boots in the middle of summer because these things were so thick on the streets. Cars would drive by and you'd hear "crunch crunch crunch." It was really bad.

TD *With **Food of the Gods** you had giant rats. You had giant chickens.*

BB Yes, and I had Bert [Gordon] yelling at me, "You're going to scream in this last scene!" There's that last scene where we're all on the roof. I had been screaming or huffing a baby or, you know, huffing and puffing for hours. So here we are on the roof and he

says, "Now, here's the big rat coming. Now think rats! Action!" I would look at the rat and my mouth would open and I'd start backing up because the sound wouldn't come out. "No no!" he'd say. "Cut! Cut! Scream, honey, go ahead and scream." I said, "I've been screaming for fifteen days. There's that point where, you know, you can't scream. Where you're so afraid. It's going to be much more effective, Bert. I promise!" He said, "No, no, I want you to scream!" And we had this big fight. Then he said, "Okay, roll them. Now, think rats!" And I would open my mouth and do this thing. Oh, he'd get so mad. He finally said, "That's lunch!" So, I didn't scream in that scene and he was very disappointed in me, but I honestly believe that it was much more effective to not have done so.

TD *We heard you describe, in another interview, that the big rats were pretty fuzzy and cuddly-looking, right?*

BB Tom Burman made them. They were really cute rats, actually, and I think they had little people in them.

TD *Being a character actor, you were kind of used to sometimes doing silly things, but what kind of a sense of humor did Ida Lupino have? She was from "Old Hollywood."*

BB I've got great Ida stories. First of all, she would sing every night. She would sit on top of the baby grand piano and Ralph Meeker would play. Now if I only had a camera then! It's emblazoned in my brain but nobody else gets to see it. It was phenomenal. That was maybe the first four or five days. I think it was about day five that Ida appeared around four in the morning to Bert saying, "Bert, I've written my own death scene and if you don't shoot it, I'm leaving anyways at 4 o'clock." "But Ida, you're the only one that survives the whole movie!" "Not anymore, Bert! I'm going to be on that 4 o'clock ferry, so you better shoot this scene." Oh my God! I was pretty new back then and my mouth was on the ground. I'm trying to lift my jaw back up. She left that day, by the way. He did shoot her death scene. She's not the kind that can be caged on an island for any length of time. She was haunting the hallways the entire time we were there.

TD *There's one line in that movie—Marjoe Gortner is complaining about the "big damn chickens!"*

BB Marjoe! I can't help but love that guy. He's really funny. I had just done **Bobbie Jo** with him, so I kind of knew him and I felt really super comfortable around him. Nobody works harder than Marjoe. He really is out there to make a good movie and he's working it. He had dinner every night for the crew. We all had little houses.



Belinda Balaski endures tense moment in **The Howling**.

He would invite everybody over after working 12-14 hours and make dinner for everybody.

TD *Marjoe used to be a child evangelist.*

BB Well, I've known about Marjoe for a really long time because I sort of lived in Half Moon Bay for a time and there was a big rumor in town that his mother had a house in Half Moon Bay. We would all talk about these terrible things she did to her son. Then Marjoe made the movie **Marjoe** and then you found out all the terrible things that she really did do to him. Then I got a part in **Black Eye** with Fred Williamson that Jack Arnold directed. I was supposed to be an evangelist who drops to the ground, so of course I rented the movie **Marjoe** for my research. I watched the movie a slew of times and next thing I know I'm doing **Bobbie Jo and the Outlaw** with Marjoe! Then I ended up doing two pictures with him. So I really kind of spent thirty years knowing about Marjoe.

TD *You're mentioning all these names of people I love, like Jack Arnold.*

BB Oh, such a wonderful man! Susie, his daughter, was also in **Black Eye**. I met her then and we became friends. Then she ended up casting **Piranha** and brought me in to meet Joe [Dante]. When we did **Bobbie Jo and the Outlaw**, Tina Hearst was editing and [director] Mark Lester didn't have an editing bay, so they called Roger Corman [at New World] and ended up sitting next to Joe Dante, who was editing his film **Hollywood Boulevard**. Tina and Joe became good friends. That's how Joe first met me. He's like R2D2, (impersonates Joe Dante)—"Everything is going to be just fine! You'll see!" And he really means it. Nobody has a better heart, I swear.

“That was my first death scene and I had five cameras live and I'm thinking ‘God, don't blow it!’ They only had one pair of overalls.”
Belinda Balaski on
Bobbie Jo and the Outlaw

TD The scene where you guys were tripping out on the shrooms, was that ad-libbed?

BB No, it was scripted, believe it or not. But I'm an improv-er and I tend to just sort of say what's happening. Things do happen on the set and God knows which lines were scripted.

TD I was wondering because you went on and on and Lynda [Carter] acted like she didn't know what you were saying.

BB That was a good reading! Lynda, you know, won a lot of beauty contests and was very aware that if she turned her head a certain direction, then she would have a shadow on her face.

TD So she was very still and stoic almost?

BB Yes, and the lighting guy wasn't helping because he was saying, “Oh, don't turn that way because you'll get a shadow on you.” I think she was very new and she was nervous. She was listening, maybe, to the wrong voices. But I think all in all she did a pretty good job. And Marjoe, of course, is terrified of strong women and so everybody was leaning on me because I was the third wheel. So it was kind of easy for them to turn to me. I was like an androgynous character.

TD It seemed to me almost like there was more chemistry between you and Marjoe than between Marjoe and Lynda.

BB I think he felt really safe with me because, you know, I'm not *that* kind of a woman. I'm like the tomboy in the back seat, so we just really hit it off really well. I think he's had, from his mother on, sort of trouble in that arena. I kind of understood it. He's a haunted person and he knows he is.

*TD I was really mad when you got killed in *Bobbie Jo and the Outlaw*.*

BB Thank you! That was my first death scene and I had five cameras live and I'm thinking “God, don't blow it!” They only had one pair of overalls.

TD Did you have any interaction or involvement with Samuel Z. Arkoff? From what we gathered in talking with him, Bert I. Gordon hated Samuel Z. Arkoff.

BB Well, I think Sam really was kind of begging off of being hands-on and [son] Lou Arkoff was now coming up and pulling the boots on. In fact, I remember him stomping around on some plants up in Canada. I go, “Who's that guy stomping on the plants?” Somebody said, “That's Lou Arkoff.” I said, “Shh! Oh God, shhhh!” Mark Lester was looking for someone who could write a song because Lynda was supposed to sing that song to Marjoe. I said, “Oh listen, my boyfriend, J.C. Crowley, is a songwriter. Maybe you'd like to hear him sing.” So he met Mark in a hotel room and sang him this song. Mark just loved it. That was the song they used for Lynda to sing to Marjoe. Plus they hired J.C., who then worked with another friend of mine, Chuck Rains, to write “Those City Lights,” which is the opening song going into the movie. J.C., the night we split up, he wrote that song “Baby Come Back.”

*TD In *Cannonball* you were directed by a man who was known to be very colorful.*

BB Oh, Paul [Bartel], God bless him! We were out in the desert, and Paul every single night felt like he was at a drive-in, so he'd run movies. At nine o'clock, you know, on the mountain, or hang a sheet from a truck. We'd watch **Death Race 2000**. He and Mary [Woronov] are like the epitome of hysteria. There's no two people funnier and no two people that connect better. When he asked me to do **Eating Raoul**, I said, “Oh Paul, I can't do this.” It didn't read well, okay? I told Joe [Dante], “This is like really bad, Joe. I can't do it.” Then I saw it and I went, “Oh my God! Am I stupid or what?” I just didn't have that vision. Paul has a very warped sense of humor, which I'm sure you know, but if you had read that, you would not have known where the heck he was going.

TD You've done big-budget films, but you started out with Roger Corman and Joe Dante, who came from Roger Corman's camp. What was it like in those independent B-movie days? It had to be fun, right?

BB It was like, there we were on **Piranha** and here's Paul Bartel and I on location in San Marcos, but we don't have a scene together. So we're like, “Joe, we don't have a scene together.” “Yeah yeah. I'm working. I'm trying to shoot this shot, okay?” “Yeah, okay, but we're both here...on location...and we don't have a scene.” “‘Okay! Fine! Write one!’” So I wrote that moonlight scene where she [Heather Menzies] and I are sitting there before the river and Paul



Belinda Balaski and Lynda Carter channel their inner cowgirls in scene from drive-in crime spree caper ***Bobbie Jo and the Outlaw***.

finds us. Michael Katz made me this huge full moon. Joe shot it! And he kept it in there because it's exactly the place where the movie starts to turn and you start to go “Something's in the water!” and everything changes. *That* is what it was like to work on independent films. Robert Picardo and I, when we did **Amazon Women on the Moon**, were sitting out there in the foyer of the church waiting for them to set up five cameras and we can't sit still. We're sitting there and we're trading shots (jokes). Joe comes up and he goes, “Okay! We've got all the cameras ready.” And Picardo goes, “Okay, but just watch this for a minute.” So Bob and I do this little bit that we had going and Joe said, “Oh God—bring the cameras out here.” And he shot it. That's that whole scene where Bob says, “You'll meet somebody. Don't worry, you'll meet somebody.” It's hysterical. It precedes that whole set-up to the roast, and Joe has such a quick mind that he can see that we're on target. We're not defusing the scene, we're kind of leading it. And you were able to contribute like that and he trusts his actors.

TD To start out with Joe when you did the smaller drive-in films was one thing and then you wind up at Warner Brothers, which is a big studio. Joe treated his group of regulars like family. He brought you along. Dick Miller was another one he brought with him to Warner Brothers.

BB He always wanted a repertoire group that he could put in every film. That was his goal. To have this repertoire group of actors that he could use maybe as a star here, maybe as a bit part over there. You would get to play every different part but you'd always show up in his films. I've been in 12. I think Dick's been in more. Dick and I have been in the same 12 movies and we have literally only had one scene together.

“All of my close-ups are without the werewolf, which is really backwards when you think of it.”
Belinda Balaski on
The Howling

*TD I think **The Howling** was probably the best contemporary werewolf movie. Am I correct that when you did your scenes, there wasn't a werewolf present? Rob Bottin hadn't made the werewolf yet?*

BB Rob had not finished the werewolf, so we did not know how big it was going to be or really what it could do. Could it move or what? We didn't know where to look. We didn't know anything about it. All of my close-ups are without the werewolf, which is really backwards when you think of it. Then four months later I had gone back to Hawaii, and I got the call from Joe, “Rob finished the werewolf and it's time to come back.” So I came back and I said to the hair lady, “Gigi, my hair is longer. You've got to cut it.” She said, “No, it's not.” I said, “Yes, it is.” And she said “I have a Polaroid!” I said, “Okay, fine.” I can tell you that if you watch that movie in slow motion, you can see my hair changing lengths. Whenever it's long, that's when they had the werewolf. Whenever it's short, that's before we had the werewolf. Joe is such a seamless editor, you cannot tell. I've had people say, “I went and watched it again and I can't...” I said, “No, you have to do it in slow motion.”

TD I know you really respect Rob Bottin. You've talked about in other interviews how you used to just sit and watch him “think.”



Belinda goes face to face with ferocious fish in frenzied scene from **Piranha**.

BB He had to step up to the plate so we didn't look like idiots, basically. And we had to step up to the plate so he didn't look like an idiot. But yes, the first time I saw Rob was the day at the pool when we were doing **Piranha**. They had just finished tying all these fish to me with rubber fishing wire. They put the gaffer's tape right on me and I'm carrying them in front of me, about 10 of them, over to the pool to get in. I look over and here's Rob Bottin sitting there like the thinking man, with his head in his hands. I said to Joe, “Who is that?” And he goes, “That's Rob Bottin. That's who made the fish.” I said, “Oh my God, he's 12!” He said, “No—he's 16.”

*TD I was thinking about earlier when you said that everyone always calls Joe Dante a horror director and he even did an episode of **Masters of Horror**. I don't know if you've seen it but to what you said it really wasn't just horror-focused. It was kind of like **The Twilight Zone** in the way that it had a political and moral message to it.*

BB He always has something. I just watched **Piranha** because they had me Q&A for a thing last year. It still means something. It just is right there. It's like time never changed. I just did another film with Joe recently. You won't recognize me. It's called **Nightmare Cinema**, and Joe is one of four, I believe, or five directors. I think it had a sneak preview in Canada just a bit ago and I think it got very good reviews.



Fellow Dante regular Dick Miller (left) joins Belinda in **The Howling**.

*TD Circling back, in our opinion **The Howling** was one of the best werewolf movies ever made, but you did another werewolf movie called **The Werewolf of Woodstock**?*

BB Yes, I did.

TD I take it the effects weren't quite as good on that one, is that right?

BB It's Tige Andrews, in a suit, on video. He's carrying me all over the friggin' place. We've got Andy Stevens, Stella Stevens' son, and we've got Robbie Weaver, Dennis Weaver's son. I'm sort of the Fay Wray to the werewolf. He doesn't like rock 'n' roll music, so he steals me or something and then I'm soon enough combing his hair and we're purring at each other. I'm like “Oh no, don't kill him!” by the end. It was a good try, but it was on video. **Werewolf of Woodstock** had some amazing people in it. It had Michael Parks and Meredith MacRae. Heather MacRae was my roommate in college, so I actually had gone to the MacRaes one summer and met Sheila and Meredith and their brother. Heather became a really good friend of mine and now here I'm doing this silly thing on video with Meredith and Michael Parks. Those were the good guys. It really did have an interesting cast.

TD You call yourself a character actor, but I think those are the best parts. Like you said, it's the third wheel in the back seat, but those are the ones you remember.

BB It's the Estelle Parsons parts. That's what I call them.

TD We love the drive-in so much and we thank you for everything you contributed to that.

BB I love the drive-in! We'd sneak everybody in the back and we'd drive in every time. It was so much fun. ☘

Rob Freese's SLEAZE-O-RAMA!

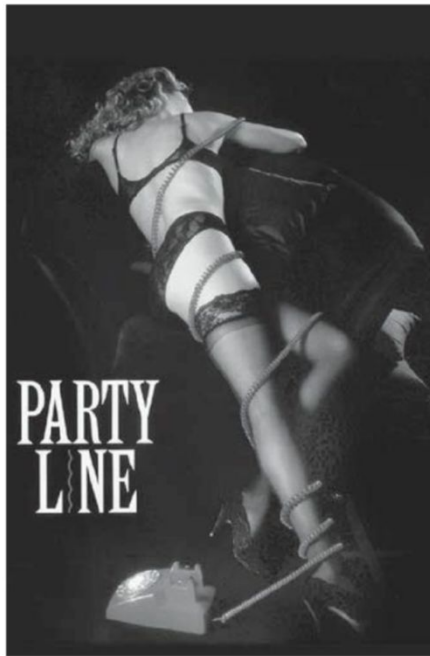
THE LAST VICTIM (1976) 8 1/2

D: Jim Sotos. Tanya Roberts, Ron Max, Nancy Allen, Brian Freilino, Billy Longo, Michael Tucci. 75 mins. (Dark Force Entertainment)

Housewife Nancy Ulmam (Roberts) crosses paths with scummy, misogynistic mechanic Carl (Max). When he's not fantasizing about being Nancy's husband, Carl cruises around town picking up hitchhikers to slay. Once he focuses completely on Nancy, he breaks into her home and holds her captive until she turns the tables on him. The end. This ugly, useless, pointless flick generates nothing: no suspense, no characterizations, no interest in anything. We just watch as Carl bumbles through life doing little more than existing, talking to himself and ranting how he should be Nancy's husband. You keep watching, believing, and then desperately hoping, that something is going to happen, but little does. You really just look at this movie and sort of endure it for an hour and fifteen minutes until it ends and is no longer on screen. I think the most interesting thing about this flick is that it is a PG-rated remake of a hardcore roughie that originally starred Harry Reems in the mechanic role. The film appeared again in 1984, hoping to cash in on the success of Roberts and Allen, with additional sexual assaults added to garner an R rating and released under the more exploitative title **Forced Entry**. That version is re-edited and runs a merciful 72 minutes, but it is no better than the earlier PG version. Fans of Roberts and Allen may be interested in these early roles, but there is little else to recommend the flick. Max rants and raves when he's not helping an old lady carry in her groceries but he never creates any real threat. (He has the look of someone who is wearing a stocking over his face when he is not, but he doesn't have the presence or menace of a David Hess or Richard Lynch.) In one scene, he peeps on a woman in the filling station bathroom and then gets his jaw jacked by her crazy boyfriend. Director Sotos (aka Dimitri Sotirakis) also made the sort-of slasher **Sweet Sixteen** and the teen comedy **Hot Moves**. Some compare this flick to Bill Lustig's **Maniac** (VS #77), but I think that sets high expectations that this little film has no hope of fulfilling. The disc includes both PG and R versions, reversible cover art and a trailer reel. Dark Force releases this feature in widescreen HD for fans of down and dirty exploitation.

PARTY LINE (1988) 8 1/2

D: William Webb. Richard Hatch, Shawn Weatherly, Leif Garrett, Greta Blackburn, Richard Roundtree. 90 mins. (Vinegar Syndrome) 2/19



Psycho siblings Angelina (Blackburn) and Seth (Garrett) prey on horny swingers who frequent the L.A. party lines looking for partners to hook up with for a wild night of frolic and murder. When Homicide Detective Dan (Hatch) gets the case, he slowly realizes that all the victims share a common connection to the \$2.79-a-minute party lines. Dan is paired with District Attorney Stacy (Weatherly) to chase down the slayer. Ultimately, a couple of under-aged girls are used to lure the demented duo into a snare, only to have it backfire horribly. Seth ups the crazy factor to the next level for the climax of this late-'80s slice of Direct-to-Video madness. What we have here is a film that straddles two subgenres, possibly providing part of the link between the two. The thin plot could easily have been played out five years earlier on a college campus. With a more exploitative title it would have fit nicely into the slasher category. Using the slasher premise as a blueprint, it then adds sex and soft lighting and police procedural moves that more or less helped establish what the slasher film became by the early '90s, the erotic thriller. It's not as bloody as the typical slasher but far gorier than most erotic thrillers. The flick generates its fair share of creeps with the way the brother and sister leer at each other, and you know Seth is a pretty twisted screwball when he mistakes his sibling for their Hollywood starlet mother who committed suicide many years prior. Writer Richard Brandes, on the disc's lone extra beyond the trailer, explains in an interview that the film was made to fill the incredible need for content that the video boom had created. Brandes felt the party line phenomenon would be an interesting way for his killers to stalk their prey. It's weird seeing Richard Hatch in something other than **Battlestar Galactica**, but he does a decent job. Garrett performs well and probably could have continued in this vein as the erotic thrillers took off. This satisfyingly sleazy slice of '80s cheese was available in every video store across the country at one wonderful moment in time. 8

"I can honestly say that I grabbed Dudley Moore's nuts, took them home and put them on a shelf."

THE TRUTH FROM THE BOOTH Confessions of a Film Projectionist By Tim Ferrante

When I worked for ABC-TV, the station had three screening rooms in its 40-story corporate headquarters that were both film and video capable. Three of us were assigned there, with one as supervisor. His name was Fred Baskin. He spent most of his time running video screenings in a 21st floor conference room. The 35th, 36th and 37th floor projection booths were manned by me and my friend Tom Hart.

The 35th and 36th floor rooms were small theatres. The 37th floor space was a comfortable living room design intended for upper-tier executives and special bookings, such as the one in 1981, when I ran a film for Dudley Moore and Liza Minnelli, the two stars of **Arthur**. The smash movie was playing in theatres at the time. My standout memory is that of a 5-lb. bag of red pistachio nuts Moore had brought along for them to snack on. When the film ended, Moore said he was going to leave his nuts behind and I was welcome to take them. So I did! To this day, I can honestly say that I grabbed Dudley Moore's nuts, took them home and put them on a shelf.

That 37th floor screen had a regular curtain that we'd remotely open and close. The other two floors had a motorized red front wall that would split open in the middle, accordion into itself and reveal the screen. When closed, it looked like a regular wall.

One busy afternoon, Fred had to show a movie on the 35th floor. He was uncomfortable running film but he could manage. I was one flight up when the phone rang. It was Fred, who said, "Something's wrong with this print. It looks awful. Come see this."

I went downstairs and he said, "Look, it's all washed out." I silently laughed as we looked out the portholes. I reached above my head and pressed the "open" button for the front wall. Fred was peering out as the wall split in two and revealed the screen. *He'd been projecting on the red wall!*

It took a moment, but he finally looked over and said, "Don't you ever, ever say a word about this to anyone!" I laughed out loud saying, "Are you kidding me?! Wait until I tell Tom!" Fred was one of the nicest people I've ever known. He died in 2005. 8

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Barbara Payton: A Life In Pictures

(Hardcover Edition)

by John O'Dowd

AUTHOR JOHN O'DOWD revisits the life of the late Hollywood actress Barbara Payton in his new hardcover BearManor Media book, titled *Barbara Payton: A Life in Pictures*. An image driven follow-up to his first BearManor book on Barbara's life and times, 2007's *Kiss Tomorrow Goodbye: The Barbara Payton Story*, the project contains over 1,000 photos and 550 pages, and offers an enlarged perspective of Barbara's fascinating, if brief and star-crossed life.



978-1-62933-354-0

Collected over the past two decades from dozens of sources—both in the United States, and abroad—the images in the book run the gamut from family photos and studio portraits, to candid, news photos, movie ads, and film stills. Accompanying the photos and their captions are over 170 quotes about Barbara and her life that have been culled from newspapers of the day, as well as from several people who knew her intimately. Hopefully, the combination of photographic and written material in the book will help provide a deeper understanding of Barbara, and what remains one of Hollywood's biggest, and most shocking, self-inflicted tragedies.



1-59393-443-2

Along with this new book and *Kiss Tomorrow Goodbye: The Barbara Payton Story*, John O'Dowd is the co-author of the 2017 BearManor Media audio book, *My Friend, Yvette Vickers: In Her Own Words*, which contains a two-hour interview the late cult actress recorded for John a few years prior to her heartbreaking, 2011 passing, as well as another two hours worth of personal messages Yvette taped for John over the course of their ten-year friendship.

BEST OF THE FESTS: 37TH BRUSSELS INTERNATIONAL FANTASTIC FILM FESTIVAL

By Joseph Perry

The 37th Brussels International Fantastic Film Festival (Brussels IFFF), held April 9–21, saw screenings of more than 150 genre films from around the world, along with numerous exhibitions, street theatre animation, and the fest's famous Vampire Ball. The reviews here represent just a small sampling of the diverse range of genre fare on display for the fest's more than 60,000 attendees.

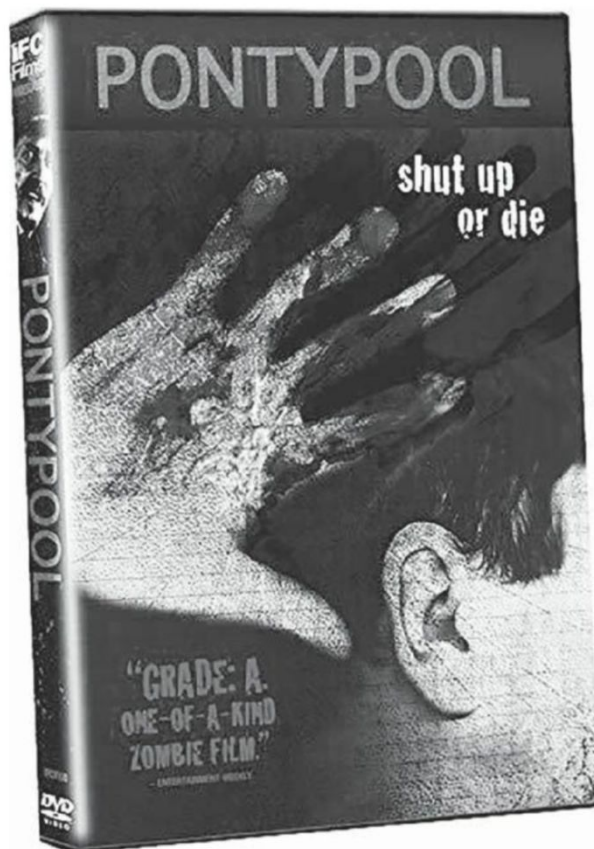
Canadian director Bruce (Pontypool) McDonald offers up a vividly imagined and beautiful-looking blend of surrealism, horror, fantasy, and modern noir in **Dreamland**. He reunites for this U.S./Canada/Luxembourg/Belgium co-production with **Pontypool** writer Tony Burgess (who co-wrote this film with Patrick Whistler) and star Stephen McHattie for this tale of two men who look hauntingly alike and an act of violence that brings them together. Genre-film favorite McHattie puts on a veritable acting clinic, portraying both lead roles, hitman Johnny and Trumpet Player. Johnny suffers from blood-soaked visions and possesses enough of a conscience to rail against his boss Hercules' (Henry Rollins) new plan of trafficking young girls. Hercules—owner of Al Qaeda, a club bathed in blues and reds straight out of Dario Argento's playbook—tasks Johnny with cutting off Trumpet Player's right pinky because the musician offended the crime lord by not remembering his name. Johnny needs to do this before Trumpet Player, a Chet Baker-like figure addicted to heroin, performs that night at The Palace, an opulent underworld hangout lorded over by The Countess (Juliette Lewis) and her vampire brother The Count (Tómas Lemarquis). Hercules tells Johnny that The Count will marry a little girl that evening who happens to be one of the hitman's neighbor children. The ceremony's guest list includes entertainers, politicians, and criminals. Johnny attempts to double-cross Hercules and rescue the little girl, so Hercules calls on a gang of suit-wearing, gun-toting adolescent criminals to set things right. All of this is merely a taste of the wonderful wackiness of **Dreamland**. Burgess and Whistler have concocted a grand screenplay inhabited by intriguing characters and astonishing moments. McDonald brings the script to vivid life with a brio that keeps this complex tale and its myriad characters in constant motion, embellishing a dark, seedy world with an

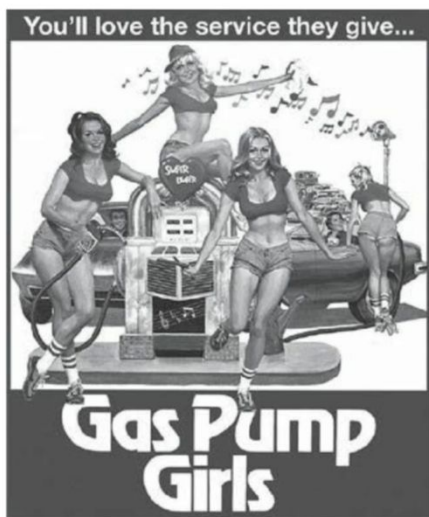
understated whimsical sense of humor. Though the costume and set designs borrow heavily from the 1940s and 1950s, the story is set firmly in the present day. Jonathan Goldsmith provides a fantastic jazz score, and veteran Belgium-based cinematographer Richard (Amsterdamned) van Oosterhout turns in marvelous work. McHattie plays both of his characters with different energies and approaches and is a treasure to watch. Rollins, with a dyed-blond buzzcut, gives a feverish, high-energy turn. Lewis is clearly having a ball as the wise-cracking Countess, and Lemarquis contributes a flamboyant, goosebump-inducing perf as the Count Orlok-like vampire. I give **Dreamland** my highest recommendation and fully expect it to be one of my top 10 genre films of 2019.

The Thai survival horror/thriller **The Pool** kicks off with a bang, as an injured man, Day (Theeradej Wongpuapan), groggily comes to in an empty swimming pool—six meters deep with no ladder—and is attacked by a huge crocodile. Day works on the art crew on a film project using an abandoned pool, and on the last day of shooting, he stays behind to clean up after everyone else leaves, first taking some time to relax in the pool and falling asleep on a float. He wakes up to find that the pool has been draining, and that he cannot reach the edge to climb up. This is the type of thriller in which things go awry almost to the point of absurdity. For example, early on, Day finds himself having to decide between rescuing his strangling, leashed dog at one end of the pool or possibly allowing his vibrating cell phone—his only link with the outside world—to fall into the water. His girlfriend Koy (Ratnamon Ratchiratham) miraculously shows up, only to hit her head on the high dive board and be knocked unconscious. "Nothing could be worse," Day says about 23 minutes into the 90-minute feature—and that's when the crocodile makes its entrance. Good ideas turn quickly into stupid decisions, and near-superheroic feats of courage and athleticism sometimes border on the laughable, with moments that throw physics, biology, and logic to the wind. Willing suspension of disbelief in spades is necessary when viewing **The Pool**, but if you go along with its desire to merely be an edge-of-the-seat crowd-pleaser, there's a great deal of fun to be had. Screenwriter/director Ping Lumphapleng (alternately spelled Lumpraploeng) doesn't take it easy on Day and Koy, and viewers will feel like they have gone through the wringer as much as the protagonists, with at least one jaw-dropping scene that wouldn't be found in most Hollywood films. The crocodile sequences are highly effective, with some well-earned white-

knuckle moments and jump scares. The animation and visual effects by Riff Studio and Alternate Studio are a blast. Director of Photography Prayuk Srithongkul does a wonderful job capturing the action, with some fine underwater camera work on display. **The Pool** is heavy on suspense, light on logic, and occasionally bogged down by sappy romance scenes, but overall it's well worth seeking out.

Writer/director Mitzi Peirone's **Braid** is a gorgeous-looking, often surreal pastiche that recalls such 1960s and 1970s Eurohorrors as **Mumsy, Nanny, Sonny and Girly** (1970) and **Daughters of Darkness** (1970), though it is set in the modern day. Tilda Darlings (Sarah Hay) and Petula Thames (Imogen Waterhouse) abandon a drug deal, flee their New York City hovel when the cops come calling, and head to childhood friend Daphne's (Madeline Brewer) spacious upstate mansion with a plan to find Daphne's sizable inheritance stashed somewhere in the house. The plan is not without its dangers, though, as Daphne possesses some violent tendencies expressed through "The Game," an increasingly sadistic role play exercise that demands punishment for straying from its strict rules. Peirone adds a dash of David Lynch influence to her Eurohorror homage, lending the film a dizzying feel that freely blends dream states with reality and distorting timelines. This art-house approach should appeal to scare-fare cinephiles and connoisseurs of odd British and European drive-in fare, with fine performances by its three leads, and splendid cinematography and set design.





The U.K. horror comedy **Killer Weekend** (originally titled **F.U.B.A.R.** during its early film festival runs) sees a group of friends spend a stag party weekend at a rural paintball course, where ex-military folks play zombies. Thankfully, director/co-writer Ben Kent foregoes the "real zombies attack!" trope, opting instead for an angle where one accidental death leads to another, until the group of friends square off with real weapons against the faux zombies. The members of the ensemble cast are likable enough, but their characters are all pretty much stereotypes, from nervous groom-to-be Sam (Sean Verey) to pretentious lawyer friend Miles (Timothy Renouf) to perpetual man-child Eric (Danny Kirrane). The humor stands in firm middle ground between broad and cerebral, more likely to raise smiles than induce belly laughs. **Killer Weekend** is a fun diversion, providing a decent splatterific spin on a weekender buddy comedy.

The Spanish caper comedy **Crime Wave** (aka **Wave of Crimes** and **Ola de crímenes**) treads lightly, settling for silly when it teases the subversive. Maribel (**Pan's Labyrinth**) Verdú stars as Leyre, ex-wife of corrupt businessman Cosme (Luis Tosar), who finds himself at the wrong end of their teenage son Asier's (Asier Rikarte) scissors. Scandals, cover-ups, and further violence abound, told through flashbacks as Leyre tries to confess and seek penance from a priest who finds her tale too shocking to continue listening to. Subplots include Asier's slightly older friend Julien (Miguel Bernardeau) coming on strong to Leyre with confessions of love and lust, and a scheming lawyer (Juana Acosta) and Cosme's widow Vanesa (Paula Echevarría) conspiring to frame Leyre by bribing a down-on-his-luck cop (Antonio Resines). Director Gracia Querejeta keeps things moving at a brisk clip, and Verdú is delightful as the frazzled but fast-thinking heroine. Fans of hyperactive Spanish comedies should find plenty to enjoy with **Crime Wave**, though it never quite reaches the potential outlandishness for which it seems to strive. ♂

FREESE FRAME DOUBLE FEATURE By Rob Freese

SCORPION RELEASING

GAS PUMP GIRLS (1979) ♂♂1/2

D: Joel Bender. Kristen Baker, Linda Lawrence, Sandy Johnson, Steve Bond, Huntz Hall, Dave Shelley. 86 mins.

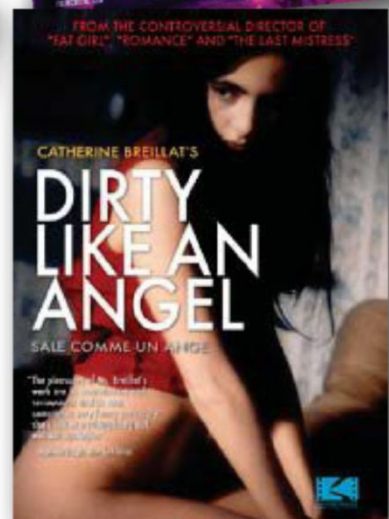
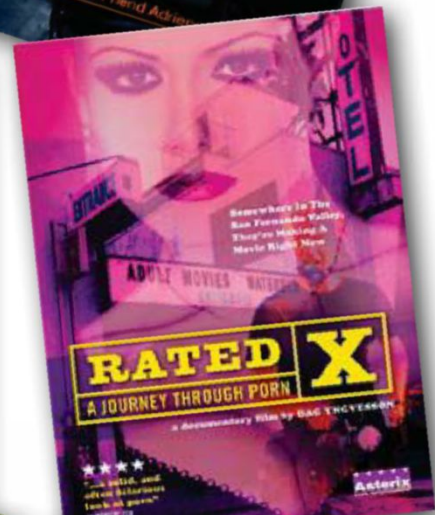
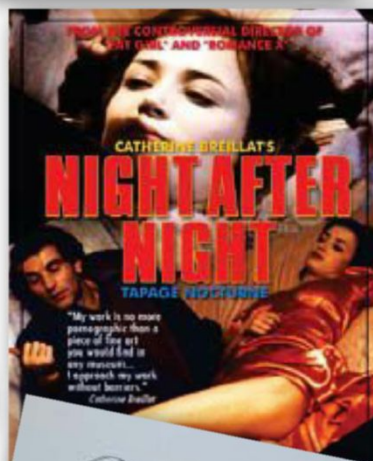
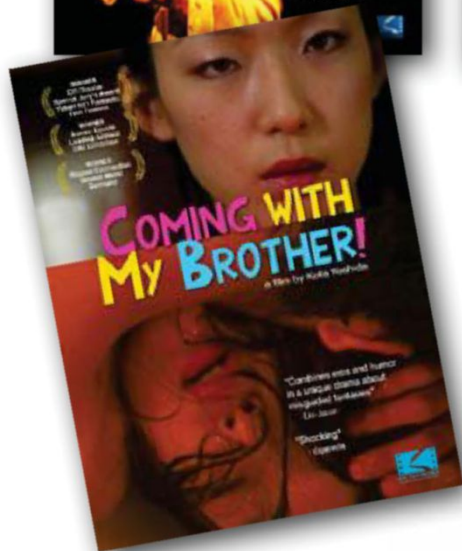
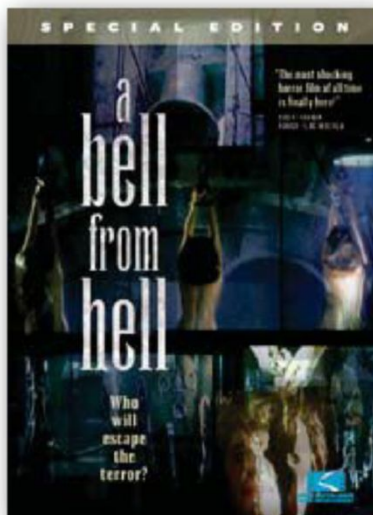
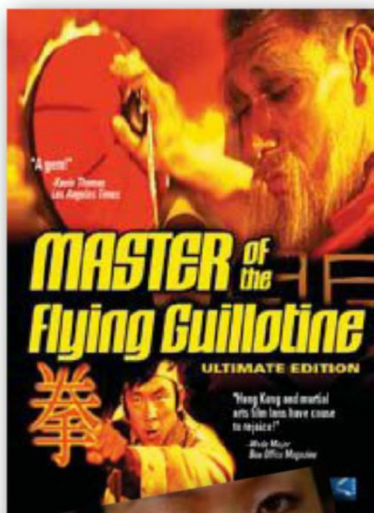
When Uncle Joe (Hall) has a heart attack at his rundown service station, his favorite niece June (Baker) keeps the business alive and enlists her newly graduated high school friends to help. When she needs mechanics, she calls her boyfriend and his buddies and when they need a towing service, she hires a trio of '50s greaser bullies to take care of picking up repos. She gives the station a paint job, puts her friends in the skimpiest uniforms legal and begins to make more money than she knows what to do with, until Mr. Friendly (Shelley) at the big corporate gas station across the street catches wind that he's losing business to a bunch of teen girls. Friendly does everything to sabotage the girls, including getting their gas supply cut off. June and her gang concoct a plan to steal gas directly from the competition until finally dressing up like harem girls and going right to the source for some primo petro. **Gas Pump Girls** is really a Frank Capra "Little Guy vs. Big Guy" kind of story but with nudity and sexual innuendos. It harkens back to early TV sitcoms and screwball comedies and succeeds with former Bowery Boys Hall leading the cast and the likes of Joe E. Ross (**Car 54, Where Are You?**) supporting the silliness. Baker does well with some of the comedy bits and doesn't flinch from some dumb pre-Porky's nudity. She surprises with an actual musical number just dropped into the film that really can catch you off guard if you're not expecting it. (I wasn't.) Most fans will remember Baker from her brief skinny-dip in **Friday the 13th Part 2**. (For the record, she was in way more comedies than horror flicks and could have had a nice career in comedy had she stayed with it.) Bond was also in drive-in stuff like **H.O.T.S., Massacre at Central High** and **The Prey**. I'll always remember Ken Lerner, here playing thug Peewee, as the TV agent who loaned his back to Arnold Schwarzenegger to sign a release form in **The Running Man**, and Arnie stabbed him with the pen. **Gas Pump Girls** was released in December 1979, right before films like **Airplane!**, **The Jerk** and **Caddyshack** started changing the landscape of future film comedy. Extras include a commentary and interview with director Bender. A little rude at times, **Gas Pump Girls** actually comes across as an innocent story that never relies on cruel or gross-out humor to earn its chuckles.

THE IRON WARRIOR (1987) ♂♂

D: Alfonso Brescia (as Al Bradley). Miles O'Keefe, Savina Gersak, Elisabeth Zaza, Iris Peynado, Tim Lane, Franko Daddi. 87 mins.

Princess Janna's (Gersak) 18th birthday celebration coincides with the release of witch Phodra (Zaza) from a magical prison. Phodra overtakes the King (Lane), and the Princess journeys to discover a way to stop the witch. She teams up with Ator (O'Keefe), a warrior who, as a kid, had a twin brother who was kidnapped by a witch to do the hag's bidding. Trying to help Janna, Ator comes face to face with silver skull-masked foe Trogar (Daddi), the "Master of the Sword." Phodra messes with reality, bends time and uses other tricks to keep Ator and the Princess chasing her in slow motion. I'm not kidding. Most of this movie is made up of these two characters walking and running around in slow motion. It's dream-like enough that it might put you to sleep if you let your guard down. You'll probably be way ahead of Ator during his final duel with Trogar, when he learns who the silver-skulled fiend really is. This is an art-house version of a sword & sandal movie with lots of trick photography. We are introduced to Ator standing atop a mountain, swinging his sword around in front of a mirror. (Most of us have probably done this in our bedroom with a broomstick sword.) The flick is weird, but that doesn't necessarily mean it's as horrible as some fans claim. This is the only Ator flick not directed by Joe D'Amato (Aristide Massaccesi) and the only one to take itself deadly serious and cut out the tongue-in-cheek silliness of the earlier two films. It doesn't stick to any of the continuity established in **Ator**, **the Flying Eagle** (1982) or **The Blade Master** (1982). It is also the last time O'Keefe played Ator, as he was replaced by Eric Allan Kramer in 1990's **Quest for the Mighty Sword**, which D'Amato returned to direct. I can see where this could be a chore for viewers looking for a more straightforward "wizard and warrior" type picture, but for those seeking something different this could be a genuine surprise. O'Keefe isn't given much to do and comes across as pretty lost. Gersak hung around for about a decade, racking up a nice list of a B-movie appearances in films like **Curse II: The Bite and Beyond the Door III** (both 1989). Zaza seems to be having the most fun here as the hag witch who can change into a super-sexy witch and trick Ator into bed with her. (She kind of reminded me of the hag witch who used similar tactics in H.G. Lewis's 1967 **Something Weird**.) Scorpion Releasing presents a beautiful transfer. Extras are limited to a fun if somewhat short trailer reel. This is most definitely not the 82-minute version released by Media Home Entertainment back in the '80s. Most sources cite this film as being rated PG-13 (the Media tape carried an R rating), but this is a full five minutes longer and offers more bloodshed and female nudity in the first 20 minutes to ensure there is *no way* this could ever be confused for a PG-13 film. I missed this the first around, but I suspect the longer running time includes these graphic scenes not in early video releases. If you dig fantasy flicks from this era, you might enjoy this alternate Ator adventure. ♂

"MUST HAVE"



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**Rob Freese's
BEST OF THE
SPAGHETTI WEST**

MILL CREEK ENTERTAINMENT
(\$14.98 Blu-ray) 3/19

WESTERN DOUBLE FEATURE

FORT YUMA GOLD (1966) 8881/2

D: Giorgio Ferroni. Giuliana Gemma, Dan Vadis, Angel del Pozo, Sophie Daumier, Jacques Sernas, Nello Pazzafini. 100 mins.

In **Fort Yuma Gold** (aka **For a Few Extra Dollars**) Lt. Gary Hammond (Gemma, as Montgomery Wood) is a Confederate soldier held captive in a Union prison camp at the end of the Civil War. He's recruited by his captors to go with Capt. Lefevre (del Pozo) and Sgt. Pitt (Pazzafini) to convince a regiment of Confederate soldiers that the war is over and it is a horrible idea to attack Fort Yuma. Hammond wants to save as many lives as he can and, along his journey into the west, he begins to suspect a conspiracy to ensure the slaughter of the rebels at Fort Yuma. Seems there are players on both sides of the Mason-Dixon Line looking to profit from the bloody skirmish. Hammond finds an ally in beautiful saloon girl Connie Breastfull (Daumier). The film builds to an exciting, explosive climax. Ferroni delivers an enjoyable, swiftly paced shoot-em-up. Gemma is one of my favorites and he plays well with Pazzafini, soldiers from opposite sides who respect each other. He's also quite savvy with the curvy Ms. Breastfull, whose name suggests a wild west Bond Girl. (In an early scene she asks our hero where his eyes are wandering, and he assures her they are wandering exactly where she thinks they are.) This is a nice change of pace from the usual gunslinger on the trail of vengeance story. It hits all the right notes for an enjoyable tale.

DAMNED HOT DAY OF FIRE (1968)

888

D: Paolo Bianchini. John Ireland, Robert Woods, Claudie Lange, Ennio Balbo, Roberto Camadiel. 101 mins.

After a demonstration of Richard Gatling's (Balbo) new rapid-fire, death-dealing weapon, witnesses of the demo are murdered and Gatling and his weapon taken prisoner. Captain Chris Tanner (Woods) is called into service, freed from prison, and sent to retrieve the inventor and the weapon. Half-breed Tarpas (Ireland) doubles down on his captive and makes separate deals for the inventor and his invention behind his partner's back. Tanner closes in on Tarpas and his unseen partner. Also known as **Gatling Gun** and **Machine Gun Killers**, Bianchini's



oater seldom slows down as Tanner barrels through the bad guys on his quest for Tarpas. He pauses only to bed down his enemy's wife but keeps focused on the mission at hand. Woods is good as the smooth-talking hero. Ireland succeeds in being the kind of creep who can't be fed a fistful of western justice quick enough. (Ireland is covered in makeup that's supposed to make him look like a Native American but more often he resembles glam-rocker Gary Glitter.) Withal, a satisfying, two-fisted adventure.

Mill Creek delivers both films via HD transfers in widescreen. **Damned Hot Day of Fire** includes a number of subtitled scenes not dubbed into English for its original theatrical release. Digital downloads of each film are included. 8

COMING SOON FROM KINO...



**David Annandale's
SCI-FI FILE**

TERRAFORMARS (2016) 881/2

D: Takashi Miike. Rinko Kikuchi, Rila Fukushima, Shur Oguri, Takayuki Yamada, Kane Kosugi. 108 mins. (Arrow Video) 5/19

In 26th-Century Japan, a group of criminals and no-hopers is offered a handsome monetary reward for undertaking a dangerous mission to Mars. Hundreds of years earlier, the planet was terraformed using cockroaches. Now that Mars is Earth-like, the cockroaches must be exterminated in order to make colonization possible. Unfortunately, our antiheroes arrive on Mars to find the cockroaches have evolved into hulking bipeds (the "terraformars" of the title). Fortunately, the humans have had insect DNA fused with their own, giving them super-powers derived from whatever species courses through their blood. Unfortunately, nothing is what it seems. And so the film goes, alternating new revelations of betrayal and danger with scenes of massacre and ever-escalating danger. The result is rather like that **Mighty Morphin' Power Rangers/Starship Troopers** crossover you forgot to ask for. Miike's film is based on a manga and feels it, as the plot moves so quickly from one thing to another, with hardly any time given to establishing the characters, that one feels as if a great deal of story and development has been left behind on the printed page. Two of the women are so cursorily presented before being killed that even their powers are functionally indistinguishable. Although a great deal happens in the film, it's difficult to become involved with any of it. There is plenty of SFX spectacle, and though the CGI betrays the budget, the displays are certainly imaginative and energetic. The accompanying essay by Tom Mes is an excellent read, though, and had me rethinking some aspects of the film. Combine this with the intriguing East/West cultural issues raised by an opening that slavishly imitates **Blade Runner**, and we have a movie that may be one of those that is more rewarding to study than it is engaging to watch. 8



The Phantom's '50s PHLASHBACKS

SCREAM FACTORY

(\$26.99 Blu-ray each) 6/19

THE LEECH WOMAN (1960) B&W

888

D: Edward Dein. Coleen Gray, Grant Williams, Philip Terry, Gloria Talbott, John Van Dreelen, Estelle Helmsley. 77 mins.

"Old women always give me the creeps," says Dr. Paul (no relation to Lawrence) Talbot (Terry). But when 152-year-old (!) patient Malla (Helmsley) produces a youth serum and points out that more can be obtained in her native Africa, the doc can't wait to get there and try it out on his own "old lady"—alcoholic bitter half June (Gray). An even more profound treatise on female image than its Roger Corman-produced counterpart of the previous year, **The Wasp Woman** (VS #21), **The Leech Woman** abounds with intentional and subtextual ironies while simultaneously working on a cheap-scare level. June's ultimately doomed "rejuvenation" allows her plenty of opportunities for femme vengeance, since fluids extracted from male pineal glands are required additives to her artificial youth formula. While the windup's a bit abrupt, **The Leech Woman** shapes up as a good bet to move couch tomatoes to cheers.

THE MONOLITH MONSTERS (1957)

B&W 888

D: John Sherwood. Grant Williams, Lola Albright, Trevor Bardette, Les Tremayne, William Flaherty, Richard Cutting. 77 mins.

Based on a story co-written by ace sci-fi director Jack (The Incredible Shrinking Man) Arnold, **The Monolith Monsters** supplies its share of atmosphere in the early going as geologist Dave Miller (Williams), teacher Cathy Barrett (Albright) and newspaper editor Martin Cochran (Tremayne) trace several desert deaths to the presence of strange black rocks that, like Joe Dante's future **Gremlins**, multiply when wet. The mouthy script ultimately turns **Monolith** into a major yakathon, however, replete with homilies, analogies and scientific theorizing galore. Even at heights reaching 30 feet or more, brainless shambling rock formations emerge as unlikely candidates for world domination. But if you, like the Phantom, go for '50s sci-fi cheapies, **The Monolith Monsters** will hook you anyway. Extras on Scream Factory's fresh Blu-ray include an audio commentary by ever-reliable genre-movie guides Tom Weaver and David Schecter, an additional track by author Mark Jancovich, theatrical trailer and still gallery.

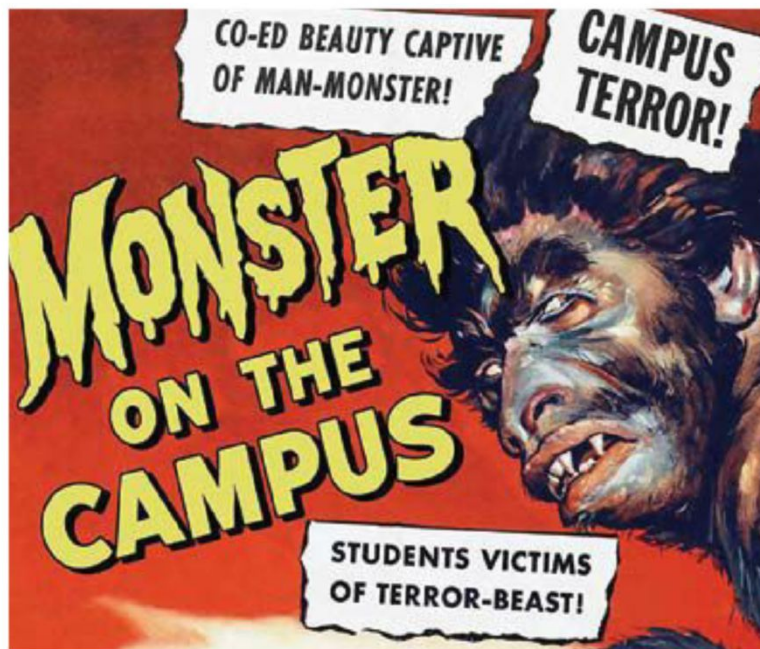
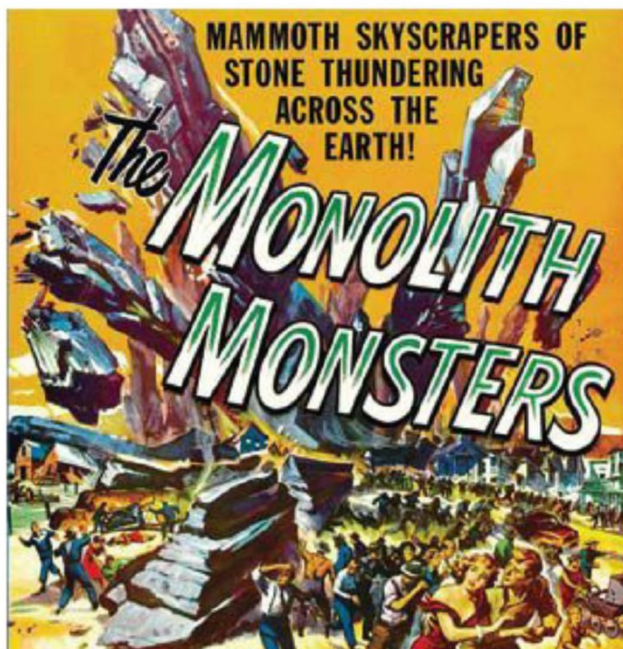
MONSTER ON THE CAMPUS

(1958) B&W 881/2

D: Jack Arnold. Arthur Franz, Joanna Moore, Troy Donahue, Judson Pratt, Ross Elliott. 76 mins.

Arnold's higher-ed horror casts Franz as Prof. Martin Blake, an academia-based scientist obsessed with returning to man's primal roots. When a dead prehistoric fish drips on student Jimmy Flanders' (Donahue) dog, the mutt goes briefly berserk. Over squeeze Madeline Howard's (Moore) understandable objections, Blake injects himself with the fluid and reverts to a murderous simian state, leaving outsized hand

and foot prints at the campus slay sites. Local cops fail at first to nail the culprit, even after fingerprinting the entire football squad (!). Blake adds his sentiment's to the decade's cinematic sexist canon when he categorizes unconscious assistant Madeline as a "female in the perfect state—defenseless and silent." And that's *before* his transformation. In sum, not one of **The Incredible Shrinking Man** auteur's more rousing efforts. Extras include an audio commentary by **Directed by Jack Arnold** author Daniel M. Reemes, a second track by Mark Jancovich, theatrical trailer, and still gallery. 8



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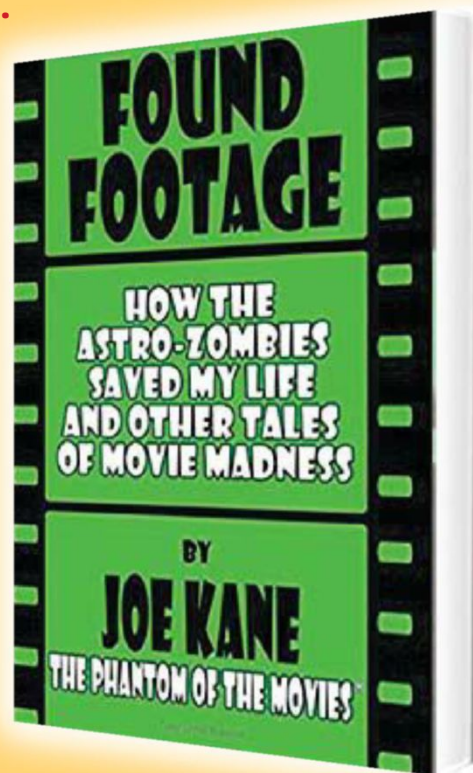
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They Came From the Basement!

By
John Seal

REVENGE OF THE ZOMBIES (1981) 88 1/2

D: Peter Regan. Fabian, Bill Randa, Marilyn Burns, Jon Cedar, Nell Regan, Patrick Regan III. 92 mins. (Genesis Home Video VHS, n.i.d.)

For a brief time—little more than a year, really—Fabian Forte was a huge pop star. Releasing eight Top 40 hits, Fabian (as he's mononymously known) was one of the most popular youth idols of the Fabulous Fifties, but at the turn of the decade his chart-topping days were already behind him. By the time the British Invasion hit American shores and washed away any remaining teen crooners, Fabian had long since moved on to a career in acting.

What began promisingly with roles in major motion pictures such as **The Longest Day** and **Mr. Hobbs Takes a Vacation** (both 1962)—as well as appearances on **The Virginian**, **Wagon Train**, **Daniel Boone**, and other TV shows—soon took a turn for the worse. Fabiano Anthony Forte found himself increasingly reliant on exploitation cheapies (1968's **Maryjane**, 1976's **Soul Hustler**), made-for-TV movies (1978's **Katie: Portrait of a Centerfold**), and the nascent oldies circuit to earn a crust.

Which brings us, of course, to **Revenge of the Zombie**. Released in 1981 as **Kiss Daddy Goodbye**, the film stars the still handsome but now middle-aged Fabian as Tom Blanchard, newly appointed Deputy Sheriff of California's fictional San Juan County. Patrolling the sleepy beach community seems like a pretty cozy gig: indeed, Tom's first day begins with coffee at the local greasy spoon and ends with a patrol of the coastal parklands, where he rousts some itinerant beachcombers from their waterside slumbers. Nice work if you can get it!

His new neighbors include reclusive academic Guy Nicholas (Randa), whose twins Beth and Michael (real-life siblings Nell and Patrick Regan III) possess telekinetic powers inherited from their late mother. Understandably, Professor Nicholas hopes to keep their secret to himself, but he can't fend off the unwelcome attention of meddlesome social worker Nora Dennis (**The Texas Chainsaw Massacre**'s Burns), who periodically visits to check on the twins' home-schooling progress.

Ms. Dennis, however, turns out to be the least of the family's problems. Four bikers—three of the traditional long-haired hippie variety, the other modeling a shorter, punkier coif—unexpectedly pull up outside the Nicholas home; hot and dusty from their travels, they've decided to take a dip in the family hot tub, invitingly (if oddly) located in the front yard. The professor demands they leave the property immediately, but the hog enthusiasts shoot him with his own gun as the kids watch from the house.

Daddy has always told Beth and Michael to stay away from strangers, and the kids aren't sure what to do next: call the police, tell Ms. Dennis next time she drops by, or carry on as normal, pretending their father is perpetually running errands or taking naps? Or—wait for it—*should they paint his face in the style of an ancient death mask, reanimate him via telekinesis, and use him to get their revenge upon the bikers?* The answer, of course, will be screamingly obvious to **VideoScope** readers.

Revenge of the Zombie remains Patrick Regan's only directorial credit, and it provided him the opportunity to cast his own children in the film's most important roles. The results are mixed at best: while they deliver the kind of spooky, affectless performances associated with the blonde rugrats in Wolf Rilla's **Village of the Damned** (1960), one suspects that has less to do with an artistic choice and more with the likelihood that the Regan kids are lousy actors working for Big Macs and Kern's fruit nectars. Pursing their lips to convey intense concentration and spouting screenwriter Alain Silver's incredible dialogue ("get the shovels while I finish my yogurt," insists Michael at one point), the twins are the worst argument for nepotism this side of the Trump boys.

In another likely cost-cutting measure, it also seems that at least some of the film's interiors were shot at Silver's house, as a copy of his (admittedly excellent) book **Film Noir** is glimpsed on Tom's bookshelf. Exteriors, meanwhile, were apparently shot on and around Pacific Coast Highway near Malibu during Southern California's foggy season. The sun rarely breaks through the murk.

The murk isn't improved by Genesis Home Video's grimy VHS tape, which looks absolutely dreadful and belies the outfit's claim to represent "the next wave in entertainment." Colors are muted, the print blurry and fuzzy, and the film's opening and closing credits (interrupted by a video-generated **Revenge of the Zombie** title card) look suspiciously like children's artwork: maybe Daddy asked Nell and Patrick III to help him out in that department, too. Nonetheless, this is a glorious slice of cinematic silliness still in need of a digital upgrade—perhaps Scream Factory or Vinegar Syndrome would be willing to rescue it from the video basement before further deterioration sets in?

8

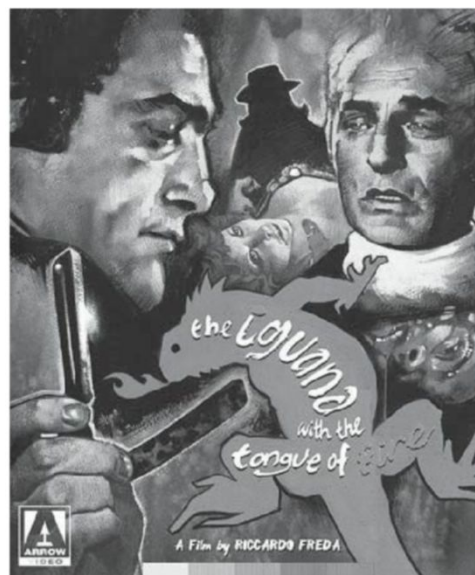
MONDO GIALLO

By Rob Freese

THE IGUANA WITH THE TONGUE OF FIRE (1971) 88

D: Riccardo Freda. Luigi Pistilli, Dagmar Lassander, Anton Diffring, Arthur O'Sullivan, Werner Pochath. 95 mins. (Arrow Video) 4/19

In Dublin, Ireland, a masked killer is splashing acid into victims' faces before slitting their throats. The first victim's body is stuffed into the trunk of the car of Ambassador Sobisky (Diffring), who was having an affair with the young woman. Roughneck detective John Norton (Pistilli) is put on the case. He shakes down the Sobisky family, who basically claim diplomatic immunity and offer little help. Norton makes time to hop into bed with the Ambassador's daughter Helen (Lassander). The killer continues to slay a list of victims and everyone is a suspect. Considering the director, **Iguana** is an overall disappointment. Director Freda was so unhappy with the film he took his name off it, opting to put the blame on one "Willy Pareto." Personally, I don't think Pistilli was up to the challenge of carrying the film. I was never rooting for him, maybe because he gives off more a villain than hero vibe. (He did better in Mario Bava's **Bay of Blood** as the homicidal henpecked husband.) Diffring does well as the slimy ambassador, while Ruth Durley as Norton's mother is a hoot as she constantly searches for her glasses. The film meanders from time to time, keeping the plot muddled and confusing. Arrow gives it quite a lavish release, tricking out the new 2K restoration with a plethora of extras that include optional English and Italian soundtracks and subtitles, a new commentary by giallo specialists Adrian J. Smith and David Flint, an appreciation of the film by Richard Dyer, a piece on composer Stelvio Cipriani, interviews with assistant editor Bruno Micheli and star Lassander, trailers, image gallery and the original 1971 photo novel by **Ciesex** magazine. 8



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(\$39.95 Blu-ray) 6/19

HEDWIG AND THE ANGRY INCH

(2001) **888**

D: John Cameron Mitchell. John Cameron Mitchell, Andrea Martin, Michael Pitt, Miriam Shor, Stephen Trask, Alberta Watson, Maurice Dean Wint. 95 mins.

One of the smoothest low-budget screen expansions of a modestly mounted stage musical we've seen, **Hedwig and the Angry Inch** delivers as both a rousing rock concert and a complex meditation on dualities of all kinds. Writer/director/star Mitchell lends admirable depth to what could have been a campy character: His Hedwig is a walking (and rocking) contradiction—half-man/half-woman, half-German/half-American, and even half-East and half-West Berlin. The story intercuts between Helga and her band The Angry Inch's tacky tour of fictional American fast-food franchise Bilgewater's, from Kansas to Miami Beach and finally New York City, with flashbacks to her German childhood, "marriage" to a G.I. (Wint) and later love affair with musical protégé Tommy Gnosis (Pitt), who's since gone on to eclipse her as a major rock star. While **Hedwig** has its satirical elements, the work is serious at core, and Mitchell projects genuine pain and pathos as our gender-bent protagonist. The film illustrates the often tortured nature of the creative process as Hedwig uses her songs (composed by costar and original show co-creator Trask) to express her quest for love and understanding. Emily Hubley's inventive animation segments likewise hit just the right note without seeming gimmicky, while **SCTV** fans will enjoy seeing alum Andrea Martin in a small but pivotal role as Hedwig's energetic manager Phyllis Stein (get it?). Copious extras include a 2001 audio commentary by Mitchell and cinematographer Frank G. DeMarco, a new cast and crew conversation, a talk between composer/lyricist Stephen Trask and rock critic David Fricke, a 2003 documentary, deleted scenes and more. For music fans looking for a thinking man/woman's **Rocky Horror Picture Show**, **Hedwig and the Angry Inch** more than fills the bill.

—*The Phantom*

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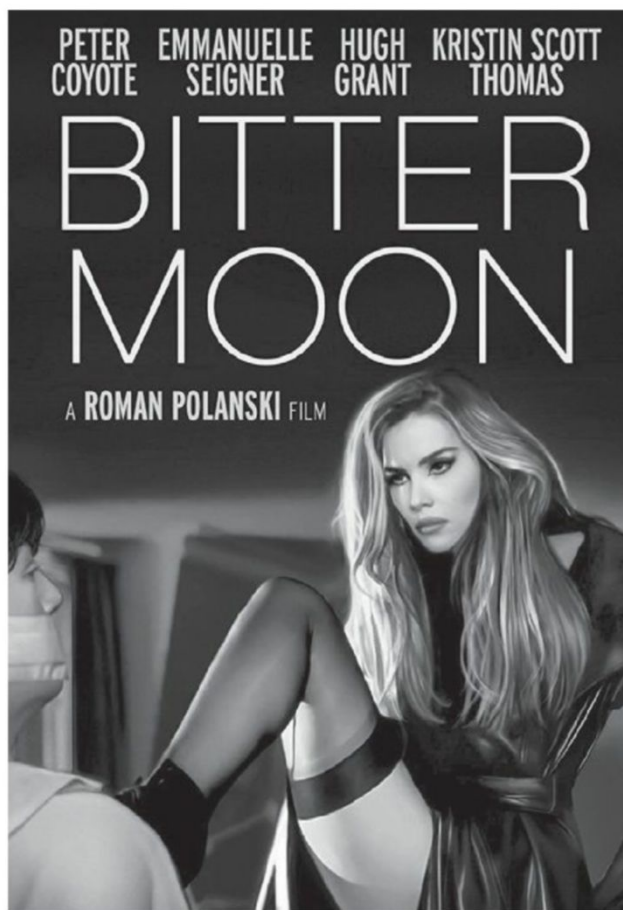
(\$24.95 Blu-ray) 4/19

SUPERCOCK (1975) **888**

D: Gus Trikonis. Ross Hagen, Nancy Kwan, Tony Lorea, Logan Clarke, Subas Herrero. 84 mins.

For Seth Calhoun (Hagen, who also produced), it's all about his precious cock. Its name is Friendly, a fine-looking rooster that travels to the Philippines with Calhoun to compete in a cockfighting Olympics of sorts. Calhoun encounters an unkempt wartime veteran named G.I. Joe (Lorea) who trundles Calhoun about the island and acts as an ersatz man Friday. The cockfight organizers are the Nono Brothers, a crooked trio of jackasses looking to cash in on the bantam bouts. Friendly threatens their big payday, so they hatch (sorry, couldn't resist) a plan to forestall Calhoun by arresting his attention with pretty Yuki Chan (Kwan) and cocknapping his bird. It's high stakes hi-jinks as Calhoun, Chan (who has fallen for her intended mark) and company race against time to find Friendly, dodge the Nonos' stumblebum goons and get to the arena on time. **Supercock** is Hagen's second of three films lensed in Southeast Asia, preceded by 1973's **Wonder Women** (VS #110) and followed by **Night Creature** (1978) as the bookend. Longtime friend Nancy Kwan costarred in all three during a 10-year period when the actress had returned to her native Hong Kong. **Supercock** demonstrates actor-turned-director (and story co-writer) Gus Trikonis' ability to draw as much entertainment value as possible from a thinly budgeted production, right down to a rather ballsy—albeit wacky—horse and carriage gunfight chase on a racetrack. That's right, a chase on a racetrack. Trikonis shoots most of the action in tight composition, which helps heighten the visual pace. It needs to be seen to be appreciated for its construction and riotous quality. **Supercock** was his second film, on his way toward firmer direction technique as exhibited in the delicately handled **Touched By Love** (aka **To Elvis, With Love** [1980]) and the box-office hit **Take This Job and Shove It** (1981). According to the label, its Blu-ray was mastered from extant materials obtained from Hagen's estate. Formerly available as **Fowl Play** via Paragon Video in 1983, this hi-def remaster is a handsome presentation which includes a Fred Olen Ray commentary. He regales us with interesting experiences working with Hagen and others associated with the film. Also included is a 16-minute Hagen phone interview from 2007 conducted by Mike (**Eurocrime! The Italian Cop and Gangster Films That Ruled the '70s**) Malloy. This is one Garagehouse release that's something to crow about (sorry, *aghen*). Available through diabolikdvd.com.

—Tim Ferrante



KINO LORBER FILMS

(\$29.95 Blu-ray) 5/19

BITTER MOON: SPECIAL EDITION (1992)

888 1/2

D: Roman Polanski. Peter Coyote, Emmanuelle Seigner, Hugh Grant, Kristin Scott-Thomas, Victor Banerjee. 139 mins.

Director/co-scripter Polanski (assisted by longtime collaborator Gerard Brach and John Brownjohn) crafts a witty, perverse fable, a battle of the sexes waged with doomsday machines. Wheelchair-bound novelist *manque* Oscar (Coyote) regales an initially reluctant fellow passenger on an India-bound ship—uptight Brit Nigel (Grant)—with the flashback-related saga of his rollercoaster relationship with sexy Mimi (Seigner, Roman's real-life wife). The couple experiences every possible extreme—from uncontrolled passion to sadomasochistic violence to boredom and contempt—leaving Oscar barely alive to tell the tale. Polanski, who cameos as one of Oscar's former drinking buddies, springs constant surprises as he cuts back and forth between the present cruise and Oscar/Mimi's recent Parisian past. Polanski's **Love Story** for the '90s received a lengthy but scattered theatrical release that eluded many of the Polish auteur's most ardent admirers. Extras on Kino's special edition Blu-ray include a new interview with Coyote, an audio commentary by Troy Howarth, and the theatrical trailer. **8**

—*The Phantom*

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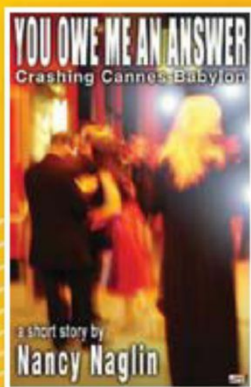
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YOU OWE ME AN ANSWER

by Nancy Naglin

What's it really like behind the façade of glitz and spin at the Cannes Film Festival?

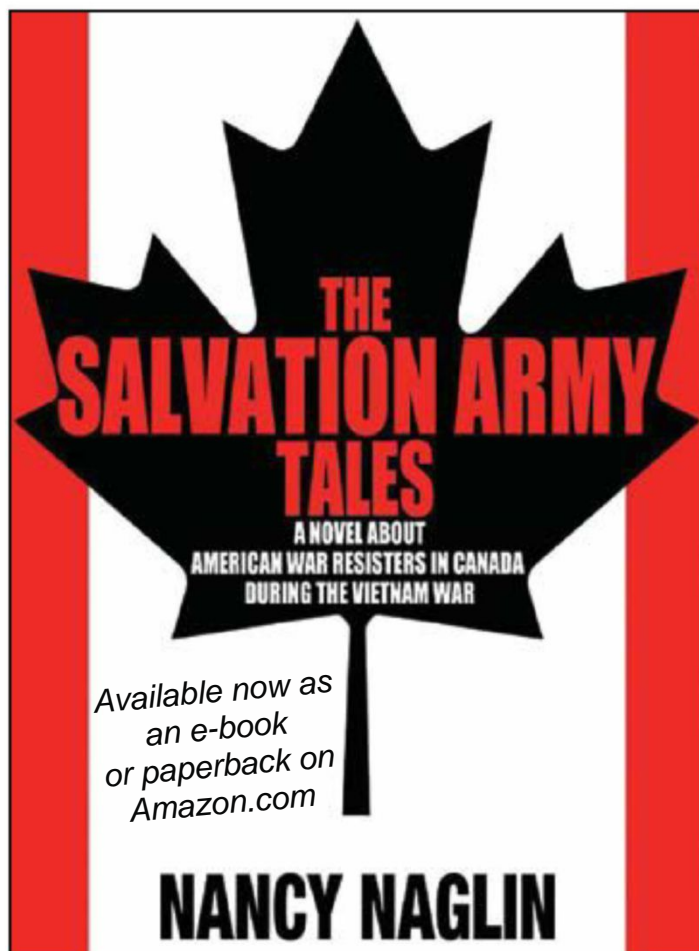
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ABOUT NANCY NAGLIN:

Author, film critic and freelance writer Nancy Naglin has been the Art-House columnist for *The Phantom of the Movies' VideoScope* since 1993. Her work has appeared in numerous publications, including *The New York Daily News*, *New York Magazine*, *The Village Voice* and *Crawdaddy*.

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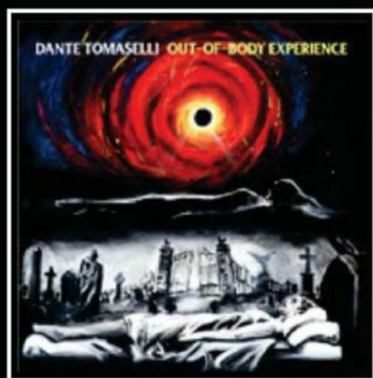
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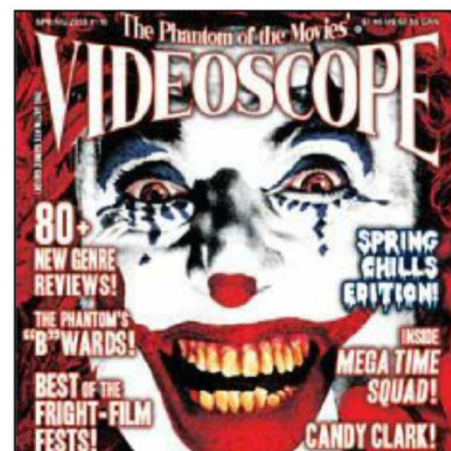
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PHANTOM BOOKSHELF

SON OF DRACULA: SCRIPTS FROM THE SCRIPT COLLECTION No. 9

By Gary D. Rhodes, Tom Weaver, Robert Guffey and Dr. Robert J. Kiss. BearManor Media. Softcover. Photo Illustrated. 296 pages. \$24.95

The **Scripts from the Crypt** crew strikes again with another exemplary entry in their ongoing series, this time shining a klieg light on Universal's 1943 scare sequel **Son of Dracula**, wherein Lon Chaney inherited Bela Lugosi's Dracula cape. Author and Universal expert Gary Don Rhodes handles the typically twisty production history of the only film that saw the famously fractious Siodmak brothers share credits—Robert as director, Curt as writer (though only assigned original story credit, he also delivered the first screenplay draft). Prolific genre chronicler Tom Weaver contributes an eclectic **Fun Facts** section, while noted scare-screen scholars Robert Guffey, Rich Scrivani, and Gregory Mank likewise pen chapters. In our fave segment, indefatigable theatrical exhibition archivist Dr. Robert J. Kiss furnishes a fascinating account of **Son's** many and varied bijou bookings, along with sneak previews and promotional stunts (including a solo show presented for a contest-winning woman

brave enough to watch the film in an otherwise empty theater [!]). We learn that **Son of Dracula** shared bills not only with Universal's eerie George Zucco romp **The Mad Ghoul** (its most frequent companion) but light-hearted musicals and weepy dramas as well. From its cinematic scholarship to its impressive array of often rare visuals, **Son of Dracula** arrives as a must-collect volume for genre fans. Up next in the series: the infamous Rondo Hatton horror **The Brute Man**.

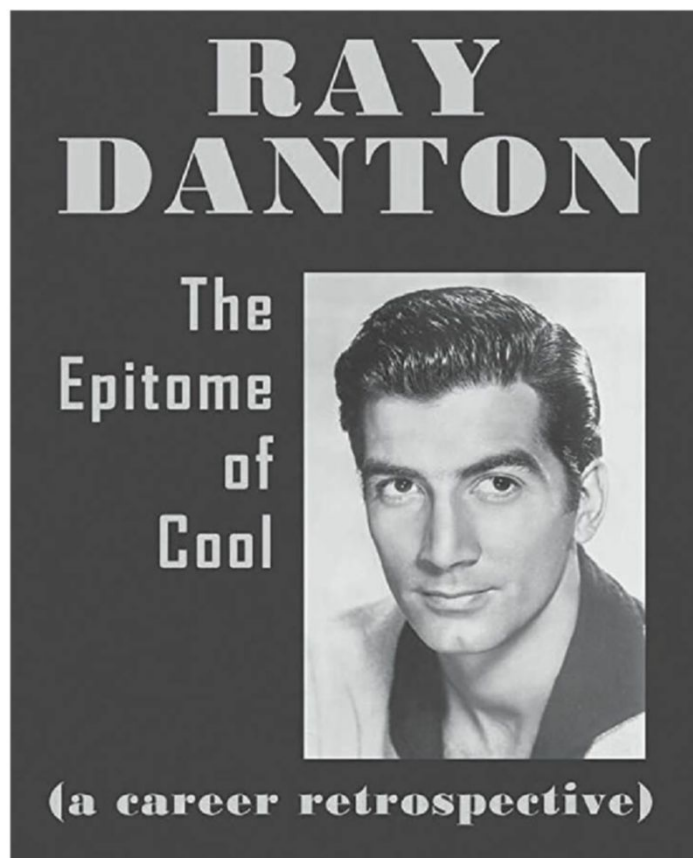
Fans of super-suave and ever-dangerous actor Ray Danton will want to delve into Joseph Fusco's **The Epitome of Cool: The Films of Ray Danton** (BearManor Media, softcover). While a frequent television player and later director of both episodic TV and occasional feature films (e.g., the intriguing 1975 thriller **The Psychic Killer**), Danton registered most strongly as the handsome, coldly charming antagonist in edgy '50s fare like **The Looters** and **The Night Runner**, and as the ruthless eponymous gangster in the 1960 biopic **The Rise and Fall of Legs Diamond** (Ray went on to portray another crime-associated celebrity in the following year's **The George Raft Story**). Author Fusco grants generous attention to each of Danton's films in this amply illustrated volume. Look also for John O'Dowd's impressive pictorial tome **Barbara Payton: A Life in Pictures**, likewise new from BearManor Media. ☿

—The Phantom

End Credits Contributing Writers

- ☿ David Annandale's novels are available at blacklibrary.com
- ☿ The dynamic dad-daughter duo of Terry & Tiffany DuFoe operate the award-winning Internet radio station **Cult Radio A-Go-Go!**
- ☿ Ronald Charles Epstein's book reviews are quoted on Amazon.ca.
- ☿ Tim Ferrante is out of the booth and on the loose.
- ☿ Robert Freese is drive-in bound.
- ☿ Scope out Joe Kane's tome **Found Footage: How the Astro-Zombies Saved My Life and Other Tales of Movie Madness**.
- ☿ Nancy Naglin's latest book, **The Salvation Army Tales**, is available from amazon.com.
- ☿ Joseph Perry covers the international film festival front.
- ☿ John Seal is summering in the basement.
- ☿ Bill Timoney recently performed in the extended Broadway run of Paddy Chayevsky's classic **Network**, starring Bryan Cranston.
- ☿ Don Vaughan is the author of **Reel Tears: The Beverly Washburn Story** (BearManor Media).
- ☿ Scott Voisin's **Character Kings 2** is available from BearManor Media.

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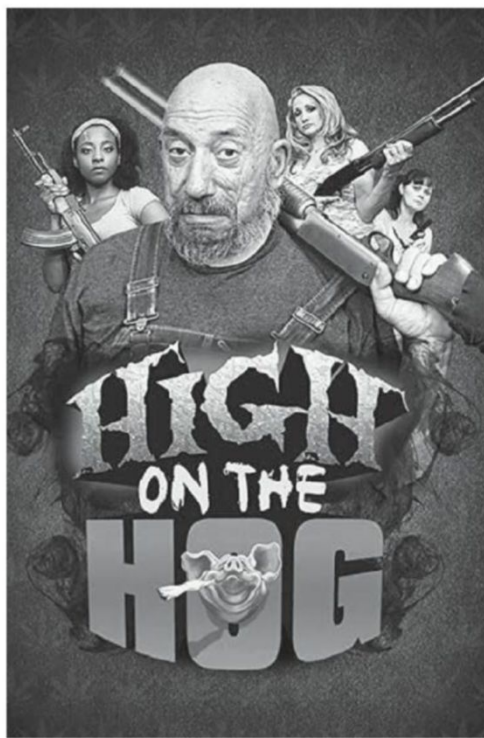
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HORROR HORIZON

Universal Studios releases a pair of high-profile horrors from big-name auteurs with **Us**, Jason Peele's sophomore effort following his shock blockbuster **Get Out**, and Jim (Dead Man) Jarmusch's all-star zomedy **The Dead Don't Die** (not to be confused with the backdate Elliott Gould dud **Dead Men Don't Die**), featuring Bill (Zombieland) Murray, Tilda Swinton, Adam Driver, Steve Buscemi, and Chloe Sevigny. Two reboots also surace—Neil Marshall's **Hellboy** (Lionsgate), with David Harbour replacing the inimitable Ron Perlman, accompanied by Milla Jovovich and Ian (Deadwood) McShane, and **Pet Sematary** (Paramount Home Entertainment), headlining Jason Clarke, with John Lithgow in the original Fred Gwynne geezer role. Not one but two Charles Manson-related movies join the digital ranks, Mary (American Psycho) Harron's **Charlie Says** (Cinedigm) and **The Haunting of Sharon Tate** (Lionsgate). In the sequels arena, we find revisits to a pair of venerable video franchises, **Critters Attack!** (Warner Home Entertainment) and **Leprechaun Returns** (Lionsgate).

Elsewhere on the scare-screen scene, look for the recent fest fave **The Cleaning Lady** (Image Entertainment), **Clown Motel** (ITN), Michael Chaves' **The Curse** (Warner), with Linda Cardellini, and **I'll Take Your Dead** (Cinedigm). Indican Pictures presents several fresh fright-film releases, including the ever-welcome Sid (**Spider Baby**) Haig in **High on the Hog**, **The Shed**, with Frank (**Pulp Fiction**) Whaley and Timothy (**The Last Picture Show**) Bottoms, and the horror comedy **Zilla and Zoe**.

A wealth of vintage fright titles will be enriching the Blu-ray ranks this summer season. Kino Lorber offers **Dinosaur!** (1960), our current cover boy **4D Man** (1959), with Robert Lansing in the title role, along with John Carradine in William (One-Take) Beaudine's **Billy the Kid vs. Dracula** (1966) and the classic British anthology **Dead of Night** (1945), highlighted by Michael Redgrave's turn as a mad ventriloquist. Shout! Factory has a bonanza of quality genre films in the pipeline, including the Hammer horrors **Lust for a Vampire** and **The Reptile**, plus the same studio's sci-fi greats **Quatermass II** and **Quatermass and the Pit**, along with Roger Corman's Alien-inspired New World outer space bloodbaths **Forbidden World** and **Galaxy of Terror**, while Mill Creek Entertainment proffers a gala steelbook edition of Toho's 1962 kaiju **Mothra**. ☸



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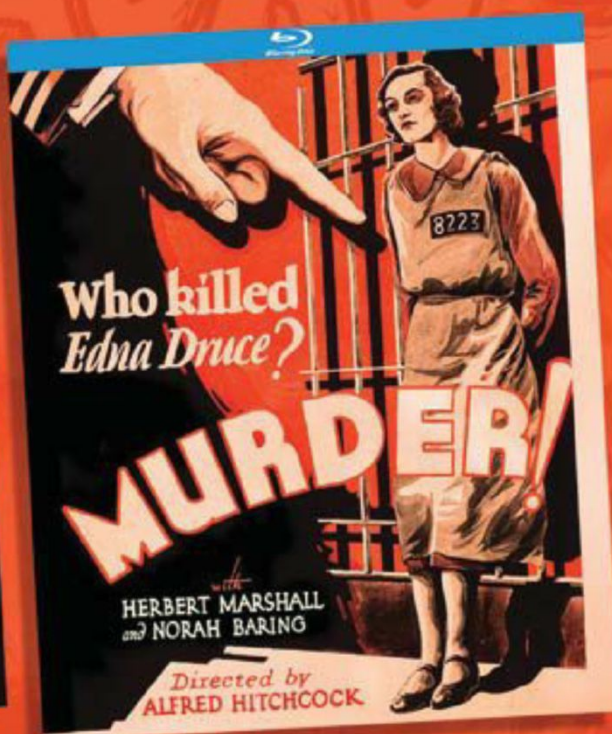
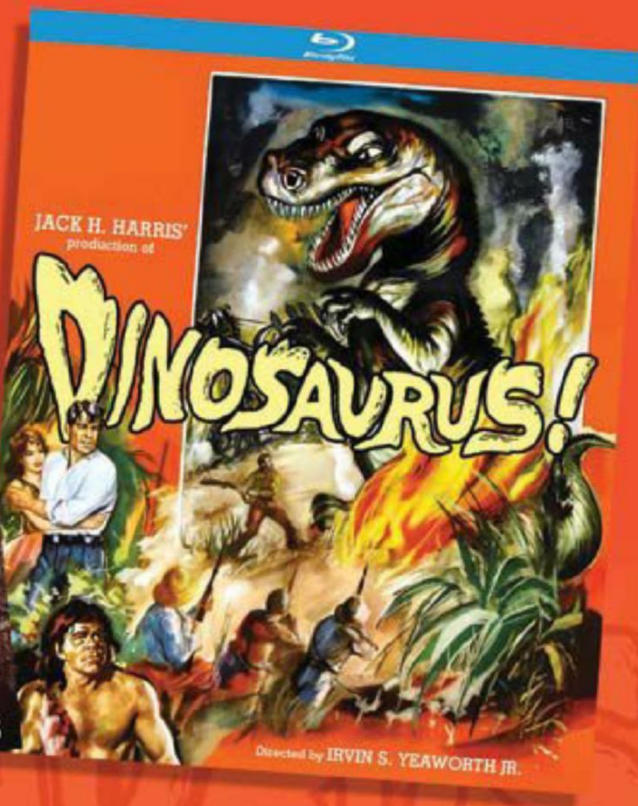
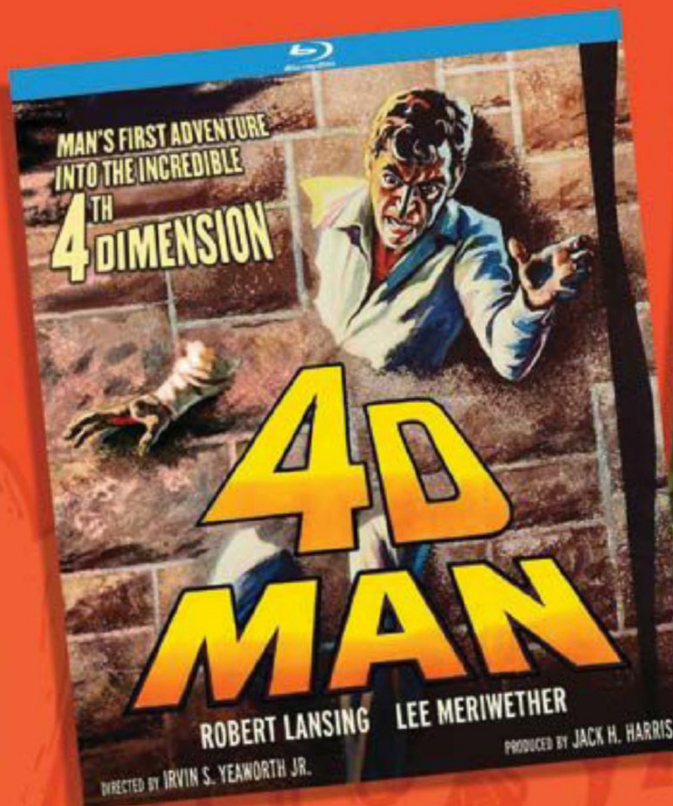
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